TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PREACHING TO FOSTER THE SPIRITUAL UNITY NECESSARY TO FACILITATE EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IN A LOCAL CONGREGATION

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PREACHING TO FOSTER THE SPIRITUAL UNITY NECESSARY TO FACILITATE EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IN A LOCAL CONGREGATION

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Vestiges of broken relationships are disrupting the unity and fellowship necessary for healthy ministry in a congregation of the Churches of Christ in the mid-south. It is proposed that if the congregation engages in a multi-week study on unity, with accompanying activities, it will promote the spiritual relationships within the church that are necessary to facilitate healthy ministry. The study will include a seven-part preaching and Bible discussion series, multiple intra-congregational fellowship opportunities, and external service opportunities. A perception survey will be administered to pre- and post-study to determine any changes in the perceived unity of the congregation.

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I am grateful to all those who have contributed to my matriculation through the Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary. I am indebted to you, the United Theological Seminary faculty, staff, and fellow doctoral students for the encouragement and assistance you have provided throughout this doctoral journey. Your support has been integral in helping me to reach this milestone.

To the entire Parks Hunter Scholars, we are forever linked together in the bond of love. The many conversations, text messages, and time we have spent together have enriched me as a scholar and helped to make me a better man. Specifically, those who began this journey with me, pastors, Bianca Canley-Mays, Michelangelo Clark, Eric Tarver, Vernon Shazier, and Terrick Williams, God knew what He was doing by bringing us together! I could not have been afforded a better group of people with which to complete this journey. We started together, we have stayed together and by God's grace, we have finished together!

Finally, to the best mentors on this side of heaven, Drs. George L. Parks, Jr., and Jamison Hunter, I am eternally grateful for your guidance, patience, wisdom, and love. You both have been a tremendous blessing to my life. The counsel, wisdom, and insight you have shared during our time together have forever changed my life. May God continue to bless each of you with God's choicest blessings!

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, both spiritual and physical. First, to the wonderful members of Highland Heights, you have encouraged me verbally and supported me financially throughout this endeavor. Your generous spirit and unwavering support have made this arduous journey just a bit easier. Thank you for being vessels of God to strengthen me when I was weak and lift me when I was down. I am forever grateful. We are truly "Better Together!"

To my family, my beautiful daughters Najawa and Anansia, you continue to make me proud to be your father. I am amazed at the women you are and who by God's providence, you are becoming. And to my mother and father, I am thankful for the examples of perseverance and excellence that each of you has set. I hope I have made you proud!

Finally, to my wife, my life partner, and best friend, Dr. Shelia Carter, words are inadequate to express my gratitude and time will not allow me to detail all you continue to do in support of me. I do not deserve the gift and favor that God has afforded me in you! Thank you for your sacrifice; your countless acts of service; your words of affirmation, and your continuous tangible demonstrations of love. I could not have done this without you!

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INTRODUCTION

This research project seeks to address how unity, or the lack thereof, impacts the efficacy of ministry of the local congregation. Chapter one of this project explores my ministerial journey, examines the demographics of the community within which the congregation exists, and explores the mores of the congregation to develop insight into its current strengths and challenges. Through this work, it became apparent that there was an overlap or convergence of similar issues within my personal life and the life of the church. In my life, broken relationships lead to the creation of an emotional wall that limits the formation of meaningful relationships. Within the life of the congregation, the reverberations of broken relationships are also inhibiting the unity necessary to facilitate the potential efficacy of the ministry of the local church, which serves as the problem statement for the project. This correlation gave rise to the project, the problem statement, and the proposal which states that if the congregation engages in a seven-week study on unity with accompanying activities, it will result in increased unity among leaders and members which will foster the relationships necessary to facilitate effective ministry.

The goal of this project was to use scripture, prayer, and other activities to present a biblical model of unity that will promote self-examination, healing, and intentional engagement that promotes and strengthens the kind of loving relationships that Christ intends to exist amongst believers. Moreover, it is the goal that this understanding and

intentional practice will lead to improved efficacy in ministry as measured by perception surveys and increased external engagement, member attendance, repeat visitors and prayerfully addition to membership. As mentioned earlier the project was developed during the completion of chapter one. However, it is initially supported by the biblical, historical, and interdisciplinary chapters which we shall explore.

Chapter two focuses on Philippians 4:2-3. Central to the narrative of this pericope are Euodia and Syntyche. These women occupy positions of leadership in the local congregation at Philippi.[1] Previously, they had each worked alongside Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, with one another and with the congregation at Philippi. However, some unspecified occurrence has precipitated a shift in their relationship causing a shift in the dynamics of their relationship and their willingness to continue their collective work in ministry. Not only is there a rift in their relationship with one another, their schism is having reverberating implications amongst the congregation which is understandable because of their considerable influence. This disruption is antithetical to the character and nature of God. It is opposed to the mandate of Christ and the intent and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In his address to the leadership and laity of the congregation at Philippi, Paul confronts the issue. He alludes to Christ's nature, highlighting the humility of the Lord. Further, Paul emphasizes the call to unity because it is an inherent characteristic of God who exists in the community. Recognizing the nature and character of Christ as consistent with that of the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit, realizing the congregation

[1] Tyler Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View of the Euodia-Syntyche Debate," *Priscilla Papers* (Autumn, 2019), 4.

would also be keenly aware of this consistency, Paul uses the emphasis of unity to implore the church including the leader, laity, and Syntyche and Euodia to come back together. [2]

The historical chapter (three) specifically identifies the work of Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, and Alexander Campbell along with others to shape the formation of the American Restoration Movement. Though the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and Churches of Christ (*acapella*) now each exist as strong independent denominations in the United States and around the world, each of these denominations began in the late eighteenth century as a single indigenous religious movement, referred to by those within these denominations as the Restoration Movement. [3] Though the movement has since deviated from the intent of its founders and early participants, it began as an effort to unify believers in Christ by prioritizing their faith in Christ above creeds, doctrines, traditions, and all else that would hinder their fellowship. This chapter focuses on the early leaders and the influences, experiences, and scriptural interpretations that facilitated their unity.

Relational theology has its roots in various Christian theological perspectives, including the Wesleyan tradition (chapter four). Its emphasis is the engaging nature of God, especially in the context of His relationship with humanity.[4] This chapter explores the necessity for relationships to facilitate effective ministry by investigating the impact

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[2] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3," 5.

[3] Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement.* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Company, 1990), 9.

[4] Barry L. Callen, "John Wesley and Relational Theology," in *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction,* eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas J. Oord, and Karen Winslow (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 7.

of God's relationality with God's self, God's relationship with humans, and God's relationality as demonstrated in Christ. We further seek to elucidate the Holy Spirit's role in God's relationality and how this should be reflected in the Church, making a final application to the local church.

Chapter five provides interdisciplinary insight through Community Psychology. Community Psychology assumes and concerns itself with humans, who though individual in their existence, innately seek community. Community psychology is "the applied study of the relationship between social systems and individual wellbeing in the community context."[5] This section explores the value of Community Psychology as it is an advantageous approach through its inherent value of community which is consistent with the character of God and the emphasis of community within Christianity. The final chapter provides insight into the project, the methodology, and a summary of learnings.

[5] Carrie E. Hanlin, Kimberly Bess, Patricia Conway, Scotney D. Evans, "Community Psychology," Chap. 28 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, eds. Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton-Rogers (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 2.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

The role of the pastor in any biblically oriented church is an important assignment. Therefore, churches, when considering a pastor, often engage in extensive prayer, carefully considering each candidate and selecting the person whom they believe God has provided for that specific assignment. At times, the church is already acquainted with the individual before the search process and a reflective look back reveals that God had somehow pre-ordained their union. Such was the case for my matriculation to the Highland Heights Church of Christ as pastor. Four years prior to the church calling me as pastor, I became acquainted with the congregation. Years later, I was asked to preach on Sundays, when candidates were not available. On the first Sunday of February 2011, after worship, the Lord spoke to my spirit affirming that Highland Heights Church of Christ was my next spiritual assignment. Months later, he confirmed his Word when the church called me as their pastor.

No matter how amicable the formation of a relationship, even that of a pastor and people, it is necessary to account for cultural differences. No matter how practical the strategies are; no matter how stellar the character of the leader; the wrong approach to the existing culture can undermine the best plans. Not only is understanding culture essential; but the precipitating events, experiences and their emotional affects that facilitated the

development of that culture is also critical. Understanding each is key to forming trusting relationships that foster an environment conducive to making the changes necessary to improve outcomes and support growth. As a young pastor, I was naïve about the importance of understanding the church's culture and my own culture and failed to reflect on how each was developed. Consequently, the relationships, trust, and subsequent ethos necessary to support a vibrant ministry were not established. Through analyzing my spiritual journey and assessing the needs of our church, I have identified some similarities that if addressed appropriately may be beneficial to improving the efficacy of our collective witness and ministry for the glory of God.

Context

The Highland Heights Church is a predominantly African American congregation of the Churches of Christ. It has been in its present location for almost thirty years. Throughout its history, the church has experienced much instability in pastoral leadership. The congregation came into existence in the mid-1940s. In those seventy years, only four pastors including myself have had tenure of ten years or more. The first was Pastor Robert Bond. He was the first pastor who was secured to preach weekly. After Pastor Bond, there was a series of pastors who served the church briefly until Pastor Kenneth Wallace was called in 1984.

Pastor Wallace was beloved by the church. Under his leadership, the church grew spiritually and numerically. His time as pastor is reflected upon as a glorious period in the history of the congregation. He worked closely with the leaders and had great relationships with the members in general. Several times he was tested but his

commitment to the Word gave him the wisdom to navigate through those challenges and he emerged with even more influence and respect from the congregation.

Unfortunately, Pastor Wallace passed at only forty-five years old. It left the church devastated. He had been their pastor for sixteen years. Pastor and people had come to know one another well. In the interim, some members chose to leave for other congregations, leaving a vacuum of leadership. With the church having recently purchased a new building, the leaders who remained were overwhelmed with the responsibility of trying to serve the membership and maintain the newly acquired edifice. In the vacuum, other men were added to the board. The loss of Pastor Wallace not only impacted the church numerically and financially, but it also wounded them emotionally. Pastor Wallace had garnered so much influence and meant so much that his absence left them bewildered. They were adamant that when the time to transition arose again they would be better prepared.

Later that year after a diligent search and careful prayer, the church called [redacted] as its next pastor. Pastor [redacted] served as an associate of a sister congregation. He was familiar with the Highlands Heights Church, as were they with him. Initially, he was viewed as a solid Bible preacher; one with whom the church could grow and do ministry. Over the years contentious relationships began to form. Pastor [redacted] and certain members of the board were at odds. Innuendo would be expressed by each faction during worship. The membership also began to take sides. Each group unwilling to relent, instead justified their behaviors, expressing they had been prompted by the other.

In the context of Highland Heights, the board is responsible for filling the pulpit or declaring it vacant. While there was a desire from some members of the board to

discontinue the relationship with Pastor [redacted], it was not fully supported. However, circumstances later developed that they believed warranted his dismissal. Pastor [redacted]'s departure and the departure of so many members who followed him left the church hurt spiritually, and in dire straits financially and emotionally. Although the reasons were different, they had again suffered the loss of a leader. The cycle of separation and loss particularly Pastors Wallace and [redacted] in my opinion contributed to a closed culture within the church. The vacuum of leadership and subsequent chaos resulting from each of their absence facilitated the development of a culture of subconscious recalcitrance regarding the formation of relationships and submission to the leadership of the pastor.

This obstinance has also been apparent during my time as pastor. When I began there was vagueness regarding the mission of the church. The organizational structure was unclear, and there was an aimlessness in the purpose of the church. The facilities were also in disrepair. It was apparent that these issues needed to be addressed. It was my naïve assumption; however, that addressing these issues would be welcomed. The power of culture and the difference between personal and positional influence were concepts that soon became apparent. There was resistance to conform to scriptural principles of leadership, stewardship, and discipleship. What resulted was an unspoken, thinly veiled division in leadership. Some aligned with the pastor and there was a faction aligned with one another and yet another group who remained objective. The same dynamics are also reflected in the congregation.

Highland Heights Church of Christ is a small church. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the congregation averaged around 100 in attendance each Sunday. The average attendance in midweek Bible Study was around thirty including adults and

children. Currently, after a recent purge, the church has approximately 125 members on its roll. The weekly in-person attendance is between thirty to fifty members. The online attendance, via gotomeeting.com, is ten to twenty. The total attendance fluctuates between thirty-five to sixty-five on any given Sunday. The midweek Bible Study attendance is consistently around twenty people. Second only to our reverence for God, the most important element to be identified with Him is the priority of maintaining healthy relationships, particularly amongst other believers. This is significant for my context because it highlights the need for developing healthy relationships that can support discipleship and ministry. Furthermore, as a pastor, I am compelled to examine the factors that have inhibited the formation of those relationships so that prayerfully God will empower us to address them to continue to foster our healing and facilitate healthy and helpful ministry because "we are always striving to increase our capacity for effective ministry."[1]

Ministry Journey

No one begins a leadership assignment devoid of the influence of others. My spiritual journey has been impacted by several people both directly and indirectly. I have been encouraged to develop good practices by some and had my negative proclivities facilitated by others. I am an amalgamation of those influences. Perhaps the greatest influence in ministry is Dr. Harvey Jackson, my pastor. Dr. Jackson has been my pastor almost my whole life. He has now retired from serving as a college professor, but during

[1] Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 94.

my childhood, he was my model for bi-vocational ministry. He was one of the first people to encourage my call but also cautioned that I should pursue a secular education.

Growing up, I believed Pastor Jackson was the epitome of pastoral leadership. He is educated; and holds advanced degrees in psychology, education, and ministry. Dr. Jackson was well-versed in scripture and a dynamic pulpiteer. He was respected within our denomination both locally and nationally. He was also held in regard by local pastors outside our denomination. As a champion for education, Dr. Jackson garnered admiration in the community. Most importantly, he was loved in our congregation. Dr. Jackson had been the pastor of our church since he was seventeen. He was a son of the house that had done well, and he encouraged me to do the same.

Though I knew I had been called to preach before I graduated high school, I accepted my call during college. At the time, I was attending a local congregation pastored by Dr. Edward Robinson. Though gifted in his own right, Dr. Robinson's personality and leadership style were starkly different from Dr. Jackson's. Dr. Robinson was not as vocal, less demanding, and generally more reserved. He too, saw the call on my life and gently nudged me in that direction. I began to learn to preach and to assist with pastoral duties under his leadership. He invited me to observe the board meetings. I watched as he navigated their biases, apprehensions, and sometimes their disapproval and rejections. His patience, diligence, faithfulness, and love were remarkable in the face of the challenges he faced. He endured mistrust, suspicion, and, in my opinion, abuse. In my presence, he was always gracious. Eventually, I returned to my home church upon Dr. Jackson's request, but I am forever grateful for Dr. Robinson's influence. Though the governance structure and church culture were not what I had been accustomed to, my

time there proved invaluable. Little did I know later I would be leading a congregation with a similar dynamic.

In 2003, after I had spent time away at college, and accepted my call, Dr. Jackson requested that I return home to serve as Assistant to the Pastor and Youth Minister. I was now married, so my family and I made the move back. My wife and I were each able to secure positions working in local school systems. We also each worked in the ministry. She assisted with various projects in our youth ministry and taught in our educational ministry. My parents were the key contributors to my spiritual formation, but my pastor was most responsible for my initial concept of pastoral ministry

The time observing my pastor and serving under him had both positive and negative impacts. Through him, I learned tenacity in ministry. I have seen him weather the storms of attack, personal brokenness, marital distress, and even self-disappointment. He has taken abuse from those whom he tried to help and kept going. Despite difficulties, many of his God-given visions have come to fruition. As a younger preacher, it has been a blessing to watch the consistent faith in God and in God's ability to perform what God promises, demonstrated by Dr. Jackson. Such steadfastness has been critical for my ministry. I can recall witnessing his response to various trials he was enduring. No matter whether he interpreted them as consequences of his own decisions or God-ordained trials, he maintained that God is faithful.

I also feel blessed that Dr. Jackson did not hide his humanity. He did not flaunt his sins in my presence but let me know he was flawed. At times members accused Dr. Jackson of being unrepentant for his sins, whether observed or perceived, I am unsure. That was not my perception. I discerned the conflict in his spirit, the internal wrestling of

his proclivities with God's purposes. In my opinion, he masked the resulting inner wrestling with a demeanor of unwavering confidence. As I have matured, I now believe much of the confidence he exuded was his attempt to obscure the brokenness. He was determined not to allow even the appearance that others' opinions remotely dissuaded him about God's call on His life. Admittedly though there was a certain duality that can be problematic in ministry. However, I identified with the duality. It caused me reticence to accept my calling because I understood it could provide a platform for attack. Reflecting on my time with Dr. Jackson has helped me in difficult moments by reminding me to be honest about my flaws, and repentant of my sins, while maintaining the certainty of my calling.

This aspect of my development has always been an asset. I am honest with congregants and others that even as a pastor, I struggle with my proclivities. That I am dependent on the grace of God, has helped me to avoid minimizing my sins and condemning others for their sins. This posture helped me to develop relationships with the youth and garnered favor from older members as well. They allowed me to share the truth of God's word because they believed my counsel was from a place of compassion rather than criticism. It is from this perspective that I was able to form meaningful relationships with members of all age groups while serving at Lampton Street. It also facilitated a respectful relationship with not only my pastor but with the elders, deacons, and other ministry leaders.

Another lesson regarding pastoral care that Dr. Jackson took care to develop in me was attending to the sick. My primary responsibility was the youth department. We attended youth conferences, involved them in ministry, and helped them to cultivate

relationships with the Lord and one another through fellowship opportunities. I was comfortable ministering in that capacity. However, engaging the sick was difficult for me. Dr. Jackson perceived the difficulty, and to help me overcome it, he made it part of my assignment. He instructed me to visit specific members who were battling terminal or severely debilitating illnesses. One person, in fact the most difficult, was Andy Crossley. Andy was just a few years older than me. We had grown up together. He was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. God had graciously not allowed it to affect his speech nor to rob Andy of mobility. Thus, when we were children, Andy could still be the life of the party. He would keep us laughing in church. He would quarterback for both teams when we played football on the church lawn. At one point, Andy was romantically involved with a cousin. In our eyes, despite his disability, he was our friend who happened to have a disability. However, when I returned home Andy's illness had progressed. Other maladies had complicated his total medical condition. He was homebound and often bedridden. It was difficult to see him and frankly, I avoided visiting him.

Another member was a church mother with whom I had grown close. Her name was Alice Boone. Mother Boone was an outspoken church mother, member of the choir, and staunch supporter of the pastor. She also loved my father and because of these two men, she adopted me as a son. I would run errands for her and would sometimes pick her up for church. When she went to the hospital I would visit. We loved one another. Later her condition worsened. She lost her legs to diabetes. Understandably, she was depressed. Her mental depression affected her disposition. Her behavior caused some of her family to disassociate themselves from her. At first, I did not understand. As time passed it became clear, Mother Boone's negative disposition made it difficult to engage her for

extended periods. My own experience taught me the necessity of being mentally prepared to spend time with. Consequently, I began visiting her less.

Somehow it came to Dr. Jackson's attention that I was not visiting Andy nor Mother Boone as regularly as I had been. One evening he called me into his office to ask why. I explained my discomfort with Andy's sickness and Mother Boone's conversation. He counseled that these experiences are the most critical moments of life for many individuals. It is in these dark moments that they truly need to feel the comfort of God and no matter how uncomfortable for me, as God's vessel, I must allow God to use me. At that point, he assigned regular days for me to visit not only Andy and Mother Boone but also other members who were dealing with debilitating health issues. It was a critical moment in my development.

In 2007, Dr. Jackson suffered an accident that caused injuries to his back. He required surgery which left him unable to perform his ministerial duties for over three months. During this time, I was the only associate still serving with him. The preaching and other pastoral duties were assigned to me. For the first time in my life, it was necessary to balance leading my family, working my job, caring for church members, and preaching weekly. In the interim, one of the most surprising dynamics was individual members who attempted to influence me to undermine our pastor. They tried to inflate my ego to convince me the church would be better with me as pastor. Others simply expressed their issues with Dr. Jackson. In each case, I encouraged them to speak to the pastor directly and informed Dr. Jackson, not always of their specific complaints, but that he might want to have a conversation with the disgruntled member. I truly came to

appreciate some of the awesome responsibilities and challenges of pastoral leadership, or so I thought.

Though I accepted my call to ministry away from my home church, there is no doubt it was developed there. I had the benefit of being in a place that was strong educationally, had attractive facilities, a welcoming atmosphere, and a vibrant worship expression. It was also the birthplace of Dr. Jackson's ministry. The elders and deacons were men who had either nurtured him or who were nurtured by him. They were men who supported him in his efforts and facilitated his personal development as well as that of the church. It was a situation in which I grew up. I can remember only one major conflict between the pastor and leaders. The memory of that conflict is vague, as I was a teenager and not privy to the inner workings of congregational governance. While he afforded me access to meetings when he appointed me, the meetings were more of a formality. He had been pastor of the church, at that point for over thirty-five years. Even when he was ill, he did not permit me to be involved in any administrative decisions beyond youth ministry. In this way, I was ill-equipped to manage some of the challenges of ministry regarding pastor and lay leader dynamics. I had learned to develop relationships with regular members of the church. I did not learn to navigate through obstinance in leadership. This would be a pervasive issue for me in my pastorate.

In 2011, I was called to pastor Highland Heights Church of Christ, which made me anxious, happy, and scared all at the same time. The experience of pastoring has truly been humbling. Frankly, I overestimated my ability and underestimated the difficulty of leading God's people. When I accepted the call as pastor, Sunday worship attendance was about down to around forty people and between ten and fifteen in midweek Bible

study. The church was reeling from the effects of separating from its former pastor. The separation was not amicable; and consequently, some members left with the former pastor. The loss of those members put the church in a difficult financial position because of the challenge of meeting the remaining mortgage despite declining revenue. The departure of members also left a vacuum of leadership. There were no elders or deacons, so a board governed the church. In the wake of the departure of key members who were part of the leadership board, to maintain stability, several men who remained in the congregation were added to the board. As a key member, communicated it was a mistake. There was still no clear mission, defined organizational structure, sense of urgency, clear operating procedures, and the facilities were in disrepair. This was in stark comparison to effective ministry models. These issues needed addressing. However, it was a naïve assumption that leaders and members would welcome initiatives to address the shortfalls. The power of culture and the difference between personal and positional were concepts that soon became apparent. There was resistance to conform to scriptural principles of leadership, stewardship, and discipleship. What resulted was an unspoken, thinly veiled division in the board. Some aligned with me as pastor and there was a faction aligned with one another leader and yet another group who remained objective.

My pastor has led my home church since he was seventeen years old, and in 2011 he celebrated forty-seven years as pastor. I naively assumed that I could adopt his administrative posture, which proved to be a big mistake. Attempting to be respectful while simultaneously setting things in order, I encountered significant resistance. At the time, I blamed the difficulty on the fact that I lived and worked two hours away. Surely

God had given me the ability to be a good leader, I reasoned. It was hard to understand why ministry was so daunting and, in my opinion, unsuccessful.

Convergence

Though I now realize my culpability in not having the desired relationship with certain leaders of my congregation, I did not always have that insight, which only exacerbated the difficulty. The veiled rift between the pastor and leadership has stifled ministry, prohibiting growth spiritually and numerically. Reflecting on my spiritual journey and analyzing the context in which I serve has been beneficial. Evaluating these aspects in concert has provided great insight. There are similarities between my responses to individual trauma and the corporate response of the church, particularly its leadership, to the trauma of the congregation.

Like each of us, I have experienced loss. I was especially close to my paternal grandmother, my maternal grandfather, and Mrs. Eloise Creath, my adopted grandmother. Losing each of them was painful and significantly impactful, their deaths. However, three losses were the most significant. Broderick Creath, Christopher Burnett, and Habray Carter are my brothers. Though only one, Habray, is biological, blood could not have made the others closer.

My predisposition is to be an introvert, but my experiences exacerbated the manifestation of my personality. Losing Ricky (Broderick) when I was nine years old began the pattern. He lost his life at seventeen, killed by his mother's estranged boyfriend. His death was hard because I looked up to Ricky so much. It hurt not to have him around any longer and I believe a piece of me died with him.

The next loss was that of my biological brother. He and I suffered the demise of our relationship years ago. At the center was our pastor, Dr. Jackson. My brother and our pastor had a dispute in which each of them had conflicting accounts. I was unable to discern where the truth lay. I prayed for each of them, asking God to resolve the matter. However, my pastor invoked a disciplinary period for my brother. I am unaware of the specific details, but my brother was not pleased. He later said our pastor indicated there was no longer a place for him. I believe he meant as a minister in the congregation. So, my brother left. When my family remained members of the congregation, my brother, I learned later, felt abandoned by us, and as a result, he built up resentment, overwhelmingly aimed at me. Decreased communication, emotional distance, and apathy characterized the following years. Our relationship was almost non-existent. We were brothers in name only. To my dismay, I had lost another brother.

Christopher Burnett, Zeke, as we called him was a brother beloved. Zeke was the younger brother of a young lady whom I had loved in the past. His sister and I had known each other our entire lives. Two of his older cousins were high school friends. Our families had a long-standing history. When I moved back to our hometown, Zeke and I became the ones who were close. Initially, we built our relationship on the strength of the past; but he was also my barber. I was his children's teacher. Zeke was also involved in other business pursuits. He often expressed that there were opportunists who hung around strictly for their benefit. He appreciated that as we grew closer, I never availed him of his offers to pay my share of things. He would tell his associates, that I was his pastor, so they became comfortable with me as well.

On February 13, 2013, his sister found Zeke dead. He was shot in his own home. The circumstances of his death suggested that someone with whom he was comfortable committed the crime. Zeke moved very discreetly and the after-hours guests to his home was a concise list. This made his death even more disturbing. We surmised the killer was someone he trusted and perhaps, someone we trusted as well. It was another devastating loss.

Similarly, my congregation's history is characterized by loss. The research revealed that before my service only three pastors served them ten years or more. Moreover, the separation of pastor and people in each of these incidences was traumatic. Pastor Robert Bond did not leave because of the scandal, but he departed for another ministry in the city. Certain members were quite disappointed, and the sentiment grew to resentment. Until 1984 several pastors came and went. As each pastor left for various, the posture of the leaders became less inclined to trust pastors.

In 1984, Kenneth Wallace was called to pastor. Pastor Wallace was a dynamic servant of the Lord and a faithful shepherd to God's people. Under his leadership, the church began to flourish. As the church grew numerically, the Carpenter Street facility became too small. The church once more relocated in May of 1992, to a larger building at its present location. The name of the congregation was changed to Highland Heights Church of Christ to reflect its new location. All accounts suggest that Pastor Wallace was beloved by the congregation. He served sixteen years. They had grown comfortable with him. The congregation trusted him and when everything seemed to be going well, he was taken. Pastor Wallace faithfully led the church as its pastor until his untimely death in 2000.

Pastor [redacted] began pastoring the congregation in 2000. He was the pastor until 2011. Pastor [redacted]'s relationship with the leaders began amicably. However, over time their relationship declined. Based on conversations with Pastor [redacted] and other leaders, there was shared culpability. Later, however, a scandal arose. In the wake, Pastor [redacted] was asked to submit to disciplinary action, which he refused. The leaders responded by electing not to renew Pastor [redacted]'s contract. The separation of pastor and people was again a painful experience.

My experiences of loss and those of the church led to the calcification of emotional sensitivity. The willingness to trust, both that of the church leaders collectively and my willingness individually was eroded by our experiences with loss. Whether by death or other circumstances, the separation from those with whom we had built trusting relationships had become so painful, it became difficult to subject ourselves to that pain again. Resistance and reticence became our postures. It is the result of an immaturity regarding our emotional health.

This captures the essence of the issues between the leaders of Highland Heights and me. We have been operating in a degree of emotional immaturity that has hampered our spiritual maturity. The unfortunate consequence is that there has been a reluctance to form the kinds of relationships that Christ expects among his disciples. Moreover, the same posture is also present within the general body. There is the façade of genuine loving relationships, and to be fair, they do exist in pockets. However, sentiments of resentment abound, cloaked by smiles and spiritual jargon.

As leaders, it is our responsibility to teach both in our declaration and demonstration the expectations of Jesus Christ. Our witness must be in word and deed.

We have fallen short of that mandate. How can we truly teach, facilitate, and equip members to be loving, forgiving, and embody the qualities of Christ that help us to be credible in ministry if we fail to set the appropriate examples? We cannot!

While there have been efforts made on an individual level to address this issue, we have not taken a systemic approach. I suspect that the perception that some individuals have is that the attempt is to determine who is right or wrong, motivated by a desire to expose rather than to engender. This perspective leads to a posture of obstinance rather than a perception of opportunity.

There has been some notable progress, however. Some leaders and members have engaged in honest discussions about how we can move forward. I believe some individuals have grown weary of the status quo. They are eager to move forward and are committed to doing the necessary work, both inward and relationally, to develop a milieu that is conducive to ministry and truly reflective of Christ. They recognize that our current situation and the individualistic mindset of some have thus hindered our collective witness and the efficacy of the ministry.

We must find a way to facilitate a shift. This must not just be an exercise in intellect. Nor can it be a simple focus on methods, delivery, or strategy. Whatever measures we take to address the issue must focus on our spirituality. It must address the core issues and be something that invites God to move on each of our hearts to uncover what inconsistencies we each have that are contradictory to who God would have each of us to be.

Likewise, this endeavor must address not only the members or leaders, but it must encompass the entire congregation. This has been my prayer for some time. Through the

exercise of exploring my context and examining my ministry journey, God has exposed the intersection. I am grateful for the revelation, but I also recognize with revelation comes responsibility. God has not shown me what the issues are, just for knowledge's sake. I believe it is my assignment to seek his guidance to determine how I must engage the congregation and confront my culpability to foster change.

I intend to address this issue through my doctoral project. My prayer is that God will use this project to better each of our relationships with him, and with one another. Moreover, I pray that as our relationships improve, it will enhance our ability to encourage each other, bolster our accountability, and strengthen our individual and collective witness for our Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Book of Philippians centers around relationships which is a key element in the life of any community of believers. This emphasis is consistent with the teachings of Christ, who throughout his ministry encouraged his followers to prioritize godly, loving relationships. John the Apostle quotes Jesus in John 13:34–35. He writes**,** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.[1]"

The inference is that the relationships between the disciples if characterized by love, will be authenticating evidence of a relationship between each of the disciples and Jesus himself. Jesus wants those to whom He will entrust the continuation of His ministry to understand the implications of their relationships with one another.

John again quotes Jesus in John 15:12-16. He writes:

> This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another (Jn. 15:12-16).

[1] All biblical citations will be from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, John 13:34-35.

Here, Jesus reinforces the relational aspect of ministry by commanding loving relationships between His disciples with one another, again using Himself as the example. This time he goes even further by calling them friends. Jesus' words in both passages collectively communicate the necessity of cohesive relationships, characterized by love, unity humility, fellowship, and moreover, friendship between the disciples to effectively reflect their relationship with Christ. This principle which correlates a loving relationship between believers and its importance to believers' embodiment of Christ is also found throughout Philippians. Consonance, affection, unity, friendship, and fellowship are each identified as obvious themes in Philippians.[2] It is the significance of these themes to the relational aspect of believers' witness in the ministry of Jesus Christ that makes Philippians in general pertinent to this discourse. This informs and shapes the project title: Transformational Leadership and Preaching to Foster the Spiritual Unity Necessary to Facilitate Effective Ministry.

Structure of the Epistle to the Philippians

Who can argue that written works, including letters, do not have the potential to be crafted with artistic flair and stylistic panache? However, ancient family letters as well as friendship letters were considered the most mundane.[3] The Philippians epistle is crafted in a strikingly similar fashion to the ancient family or friendship letter. Fee offers

[2] G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians,* "The Pillar New Testament Commentary," (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 8.

[3] Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, "The IVP New Testament Commentary Series," (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 13.

the following detailed structure of family letters along with the corresponding sections of the epistle:

1. The address and greeting [1:1–2]
2. Prayer for the recipients [1:3–11]
3. Reassurance about the sender (= "my affairs") [1:12–26]
4. Request for reassurance about the recipients ("your affairs") [1:27–2:18; 3:1–4:3]
5. Information about movements of intermediaries [2:19–30]
6. Exchange of greetings with third parties [4:21–22]
7. Closing wish for health [4:23][4]

He further explains that though this letter would be deemed simplistic and not worthy of much attention because of its construct, its content renders the letter noticeably profound.[5] Much of the profundity centers around the partnership of the believers with the author in the ministry of Christ – a partnership that was focused on spreading the gospel.

Purpose

In some ways, the very structure of the epistle reveals its purpose. Letters between friends in antiquity were used to keep abreast of friends' welfare which predisposes a concern for mutual goodwill. Fee comments, "Even though the description "hortatory letter of friendship" gives insight into many this letter's special features, above all

[4] Fee, *Philippians*, 14.

[5] Fee, *Philippians*, 13-14.

Philippians is an … intensely Christian, expression of such a letter."[6] As such the author first seeks to encourage his audience, expressing a desire for them to demonstrate a mindset and behavior that glorifies God. Noting their partnership with him in the gospel through their participation in ministry, the author writes:

> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God (Phi. 1:3-11).

The letter continues as the audience is informed of the author's condition, which furthers the purpose of encouragement. The author writes:

> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice (Phi. 1:12-18).

In concert, these verses capture the tone and purpose of the letter, which is to promote the furtherance of the gospel by encouraging the partnership between the audience themselves and the author. The author's principal concern is with the gospel, a word that occurs more often in this letter than in any other canonical epistle. The specific concern

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[6] Fee, *Philippians*, 22.

for the Philippians is their ongoing relationship with Christ.[7] Consequently, the author effectively, perhaps most importantly, communicates that the partnership/friendship with the Philippians is fundamentally changed from a customary two-way relationship to a three-way one between the author, the Philippians, and Christ. Again, the emphasis is Christ which is facilitated by their shared involvement in the gospel and their relationship with the author. So, while they participate in most of the Greco-Roman friendship customs, it is in the context of Christ and the gospel.[8]

Authorship and Integrity of the Epistle

Authorship

There is overwhelming agreement that the Apostle Paul is the author of Philippians, as the epistle claims (1:1). Paul's experiences relative to his trials, the opposition of his detractors, and theological arguments found in Philippians are consistent with other virtually undisputed books of Pauline authorship such as Romans, First and Second Corinthians, and Galatians.[9] Paul was recognized by early church leaders as the author of Philippians. As such, there is relative confidence that Paul is the authentic author of the Epistle to the Philippians.

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[7] Fee, *Philippians*, 22.

[8] Fee, *Philippians*, 21.

[9] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 15.

Integrity

While there is confidence concerning the authorship of Philippians, there has emerged significant debate regarding its integrity – a debate that must be given consideration.[10] Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, in his *To the Philippians*, refers to "letters" Paul wrote to them. This reference to letters is taken by some as external evidence that Paul penned multiple letters to the church in Philippi.[11] Thus, some scholars argue that Philippians is an amalgamation of letters, typically three. The text, in their assessment, is divided as follows in chronological order: Letter A (4:10–20), a brief letter of thanks in immediate response to the arrival of Epaphroditus with a gift from the Philippians; Letter B (1:1–3:1; 4:2-9), sent with Epaphroditus when returning to the Philippians was a letter of reassurance to inform the church about Paul's circumstances and to encourage unity amongst the believers; and finally Letter C (3:2–4:1), was sent later, perhaps upon Paul's release to fully address the theological debate at Philippi, warning them of his opposing teachers.[12]

Hansen argues a comprehensive examination of the "textual tradition" of Philippians does not lead one to conclude there were multiple letters used to consolidate a single letter.[13] He writes:

> When Philippians is viewed as one letter without interpolations, the remarkable thematic continuity between different sections of the letter becomes clearly apparent. For example, the themes of progress in the faith (1:25; 2:12–14; 3:12–16), standing firm in the Lord (1:27; 4:1), humility (2:2, 5–8; 3:4–8), suffering

[10] Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 10.

[11] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 17.

[12] Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 11.

[13] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 17.

> (1:29–30; 2:8; 3:10), and the final victory of Christ (2:9–11; 3:20–21) bind the letter together into one harmonious whole. Even the vocabulary employed to develop these themes ties the parts of the whole letter together. For example, the vocabulary of "citizenship," "standing firm," and "striving together" occur in the same order in 1:27 and in 3:20–4:3 to mark the beginning and the end of a unified section. These observations provide a solid basis for accepting Philippians as one unified letter rather than as awkwardly disjointed fragments.[14]

Occasion and Origin of the Epistle

Occasion

The claim is that Paul is in jail awaiting a trial on allegations that might result in death. There is a well-established congregation of Christ followers in the city where he is being kept (1:14; 4:22). The majority of these (1:16) are Paul's supporters, although some are against him. Paul avers that, out of jealousy and resentment, his opponents have increased their proclamation efforts to exacerbate the pain of his incarceration. Moreover, Paul laments that the Philippians have been slow in providing aid, for which he might have been offended were it not for the fact they "lacked opportunity," inferring that he has likely been imprisoned for some time.[15] The relief from the Philippians finally came when Epaphroditus traveled from Philippi to Paul while he was imprisoned in order to take care of him and provide a gift from the church. Along the way, however, Epaphroditus, fell ill and nearly died. When he learned of the church's distress regarding his health, he became concerned about them. In response to the concern of the church and to thank them for their support, Paul writes this letter. He informs them of his circumstances and assures them that their messenger is okay and fulfilled his assignment

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[14] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 18–19.

[15] Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 19–20.

with integrity. Paul sends the epistle with Epaphroditus and exhorts the church to rejoice when Epaphroditus returns home.

Origin

While there is consensus regarding the occasion of the Philippians epistle, there is divergence regarding its origin. Although the traditional view is that Paul wrote the letter from Rome, many people favor Ephesus or Caesarea as the city of origin. Two rationales are given to challenge the traditional view. First, opponents of the traditional view contend that the distance between Rome and Philippi seems to be too great to support the ease of communication implied by the epistle. Four journeys are presented in the text. This number of journeys seems to suggest a relatively short distance between the place of Paul's imprisonment and Philippi. From Rome to Philippi, was between 700 to 900 miles, depending on the mode of travel. This seems at odds with the quick turnaround of messages between Paul and the Philippians as suggested by the modern text.[16] Secondly, Paul's announcement of his intention to travel to Philippi soon after being released from prison presents another issue with the idea that Rome is the origin of the epistle. Returning to Philippi would go against Paul's claim that his work in the east was finished and his intent to continue his ministry in Spain if he were to be writing from Rome (Rom 15:24, 28). Paul refers to his alteration of prior arrangements in Second Corinthians 1:15–17, but he makes no mention in Philippians of his desire to travel to Philippi following his captivity.[17]

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[16] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 21.

[17] Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, 23.

To be sure, the debate over the origin of the Philippian letter's authorship is conjectural and therefore fruitless. Fortunately, a decision does not materially alter readers' understanding of the letter in either direction. Principal for our understanding of Philippians is the internal indicators that Paul wrote this letter while he was "in chains" (1:7, 13, 14, 17) to express faith in his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to express his grateful love for the Philippians, his friends, and partners in the gospel. His account of his incarceration and the gift he received from Philippi paint a vivid picture of the circumstances surrounding his letter at the time it was written.[18]

Socio-Religious Setting

The city of Philippi, at the time of the epistle, was a city in the Roman province of Macedonia. Historically, it had been designated a Roman colony by Mark Anthony and Octavian, later known as Caesar Augustus, after defeating the leaders of the coup d'état against Julius Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius in B.C. Philippi and the surrounding area became increasingly popular with retired Roman soldiers. In Philippi, more Roman soldiers received allotments. Since Philippi was a Roman colony, its residents had all the rights and benefits that came with being a Roman citizen, including being excused from paying taxes and being subject to Roman law, or ius Italicum. The mother city, Rome was used as inspiration for Philippi, which subsequently had an overwhelmingly Roman culture at the time of Paul's epistle.[19] The religious life of the city was an amalgamation of cultures. In addition to the Imperial cult religion of the emperors, the residents of

[18] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 25.

[19] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 2.

Philippi worshipped other gods. One of the most prominent examples is the goddess, Diana. Diana was associated with fertility, childbirth, and other concerns usually associated with women. Many of her worshippers and priestesses were women. Women would also play important roles in the life of the church as the gospel began to be preached in Philippi.

Focus Text

According to Philippians 4:2-3, it states, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." In these verses Paul encourages two women, Euodia and Syntyche to "agree in the Lord." The specific cause for what appears to be a disruption in unity between the two is not explicitly articulated which makes it difficult to determine precisely what Paul is requesting of them.[20] As such, interpretations vary. Peterlin suggests a contention between Euodia and Syntyche that is indicative of a disruption of unity extant in the larger church context in Philippi. He contends Paul's letter to the Philippians has been strategically crafted to address not only this dispute but more importantly, the disunity of the church at large.[21] Peterlin is not alone in purporting a culture of disunity within the Philippian church, but variations are offered. One difference is the suggestion that the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche is

[20] Tyler Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View of the Euodia-Syntyche Debate," *Priscilla Papers* Autumn, 2019, 4.

[21] Davorin Peterlin, *Paul's Letters to Philippians in Light of Disunity in the Church* (Leiden, UK: Brill, 1995), 24.

the epistle's primary focus and that the preceding arguments have been carefully fashioned to culminate in Paul addressing this dispute that has reverberated negatively in the congregation.[22] Still some authors aver this is an extreme interpretation. They counter that inferring widespread discord within the congregation fails to consider the tenor of friendship characterized by joy that permeates the milieu of the entire letter.[23]

In other interpretations, the significance of Euodia and Syntyche to the church at Philippi has been largely diminished. The name Syntyche is expressed in its masculine form in the King James Version, while both names are rendered in their masculine versions by Tyndale. Additionally, Tyndale separates verse two from the following verses which in effect obscures the prominence of Euodia and Syntyche, regarding their influence in the church, which is otherwise visible even in cursory reading.[24] Though Reumann suggests this may be the result of a traditionalist, masculine reading, for over a century the role of women in the Philippian contexts gained greater appreciation.[25]

The specific role of these women of these women is unclear. Some have equated them alternately with the *episkopoi* – bishops and *diakonoi* – deacons of Philippians 1:1.[26] Irrespective of their precise office, it is apparent that these women held some prominence and thus influence in the congregation. "Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the

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[22] Robert Hull, Jr., "Constructing Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:2-3 and the Informed Imagination," *Priscilla Papers,* Spring, 2016, 3.

[23] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View," 4.

[24] Hull, "Constructing Euodia and Syntyche," 3.

[25] John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33B, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 627.

[26] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View," 4.

gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phi. 4:3).

Here Paul includes Euodia and Syntyche as *synergon* – coworkers (NRSV), articulating they each have *synathleo moi meta* – [struggled beside (NRSV), labored side by side (ESV)] with him. Paul uses this word throughout his epistles to refer to individuals such as Apollos (1 Cor. 3:9), Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-4) who engage in both local and itinerant ministry.[27] Additionally, Allred cites a homily of John Chrysotom where he suggests the women to be *kephalaoin* – chiefs, of the church at Philippi.[28] It is possible that they were leaders of house churches or functioned a role similar to Pheobe as detailed in Romans 16:1-2.[29] Perhaps, like those mentioned in First Corinthians 11:5, they were among the women who preached and prayed in the Pauline influence churches.[30]

The fact that Paul included their names suggests that they were influential church members who were seriously contributing to division in the congregation. Addressing them by name appears unjustified if their private dispute was an exceptional incident within an otherwise unified church. However, if their disagreement seriously threatened the church's unity, then mentioning them by name in a letter intended to be read to the entire congregation appropriately and clearly identifies a significant factor contributing to

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[27] Hull, "Constructing Euodia and Syntyche," 6.

[28] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View," 4.

[29] Hull, "Constructing Euodia and Syntyche," 6.

[30] Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians*, "Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching," (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press, 1985), 71.

the issue of disunity that is addressed throughout the epistle.[31] The designation of Paul, the speculation of Chrysotom, and the possible application of other scriptural texts, in concert provide substantial validation that even if these women were not numbered among the bishops or deacons, minimally they had garnered significant influence and occupied important roles in the congregation.

The influence of Euodia and Syntyche and the implications of their actions for the church at large leads Paul to appeal to each of them. In verse two he says, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche…" Paul uses parakaleo a word that means to call to one's side, thus, to call to aid; every kind of calling to which is meant to produce a particular effect, whether of admonishing, exhorting, cheering, and helping.[32] Based on statistics alone, *parakaleo* and its derivatives are among the most important terms for speaking and influencing in the New Testament. The verb is used in the Synoptics twenty-five times, predominantly as a request in the sense of petition. It is used in Paul's epistles about forty-four times and in the other epistles about eighteen times, overwhelmingly as a request in the sense of a summoning address and as exhort and comfort.[33] In Philippians 4:2, Paul employs the word when addressing both Euodia and Syntyche. By doing so, he is speaking to each directly, showing that he is addressing them separately and refusing to take sides. He was concerned not with the question of who was in the right, but rather

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[31] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 282.

[32] Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (London, UK: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 97.

[33] Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 23.

with the need for reconciliation and unity.[34] Moreover, his tone does not come across as commanding, but instead it communicates a respectful invitation to voluntarily comply with his request. Paul invokes in both Euodia and Syntyche, their sense of familiarity with him, using their friendship to convey his egalitarianist posture which strengthens the exhortation.[35]

Paul exhorts these women to agree. The NRSV renders *auto fronein* – be of the same mind. It is an appeal to think the same thing, have the same attitude, have the same opinion, and be intent on the same goal.[36] In this case, the goal should be facilitating the partnership in the gospel to which Paul alludes throughout the epistle. Evidently, the behavior of Euodia and Syntyche was jeopardizing the realization of that goal which was a manifestation of divergent mindsets.

This *phroneo/phronein* language is repeated ten times throughout Philippians. In 4:2, Paul issues the same call to Euodia and Syntyche that he has issued to the entire congregation in 2:2 and 2:5.[37] He admonishes the behaviors and mindsets that facilitate this unity "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phi. 2:2). **"**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 2:5). Again, Paul's reiteration of this admonition draws attention to the role Euodia and Syntyche play in the matter. The Philippians would be reminded of this admonition and thus understand the emphatic nature of Paul's appeal to

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[34] Grant R. Osborne, *Philippians: Verse by Verse*, "Osborne New Testament Commentaries," (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 163.

[35] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View," 4.

[36] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 283.

[37] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View," 5.

function in a way that demonstrates the *koinonia* - partnership (ESV) to which he alludes in 1:5, "because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." It should be noted that Paul uses this same word in 2:1, where the ESV renders it participation. "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." In effect, he articulates that being of one mind is a function or byproduct of partnership in the Holy Spirit. This is not a novel principle, but one which is observed and articulated by the Hebrew scriptures. In Psalm 133 we read:

> Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! **2** It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes 3It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore (Ps. 133:1-3).

The text uses simile to liken the unity of brethren to anointing oil used to consecrate Aaron, the high priest. While initially seeming to refer to the benefits of social unity, verse three introduces a theological component that articulates a spiritual principle that informs but also transcends the social. The psalmist likens unity to the blessing of dew which comes down from the heavens upon the place where God has commanded his blessing. Mays writes:

> Zion is the place of ordained blessing, the place where the people of the Lord in their unity receive everlasting life. It is this abundant life, which Israel can receive only in its unity, and only from the Presence at this place that is the *summum bonum*. The life that the Lord gives his people in their unity is the supreme family value…In services of Christian unity, the psalm is a witness that God is at work building a family that transcends all the given and instituted barriers that separate and diminish life.[38]

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[38] James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 414.

Paul also draws on this principle in Ephesians 4:3, which states, "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." He infers that unity is born of the Holy Spirit and encourages the readers to strive to maintain that unity that God, the Holy Spirit has established. The principle that unity is a God-empowered endeavor is also present in the focus text.

In The Lord

Paul implies that Euodia and Syntyche can achieve the singleness of mind he calls them to, only in the Lord. He encourages the women to aim for unity and harmony in life which is possible because of their shared faith in the Lord, which is far more than just agreement in thinking or opinion. The expression "in the Lord" refers to their individual and corporate submission to the Lord.[39] This appeal, to share the same thinking and to have the same mind, has been articulated previously in the epistle. To reiterate, it is a demonstration of partnership born of the Spirit but modeled by Christ (2:6–11), where Jesus humbled himself by taking the "form of a slave" and thus becoming obedient unto death on a cross.[40]

This qualifying statement "in the Lord," also makes clear that the issue is beyond a private matter but has implications for how the Philippians represent the gospel – how they do ministry. Therefore, not only does Paul infer the necessity of the Holy Spirit's enablement for Euodia and Syntyche to persist in the unity of which Christ is the exemplar, he, explicitly enlists the help of an individual referred to as a "loyal

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[39] I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1995), 125.

[40] Fee, *Philippians*, 168–169.

companion." "Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phi. 4:3).

In addition, Paul reminds this person, and the congregation as they listen, of the collaborative labor of Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and other fellow laborers of the gospel, some of whom, no doubt, were members of the congregation. It is impossible to determine precisely whom Paul is identifying as his loyal companion. What is clear, however, is the linguistic connection among four words used in this verse, "syzygos, syllambano, synathleo, and synergos" each of which employs the "sy" prefix, which infers companionship or togetherness.[41] As Euodia and Syntyche have each "synathleo moi meta" – [struggled beside (NRSV), labored side by side (ESV)] regarding Paul, he now encourages his loyal companion to "syllambano" - play an active, in fact, labor-intensive role in the endeavor for Euodia and Syntyche to be unified. The primary meaning of this verb help carries a strong sense of physical action: "seize, grasp, apprehend, catch, and take hold of together.[42] The effort implied by Paul's use of the verb syllambano, coupled with the emphatic particle kai, and the verb of request erotao, stresses his sense of urgency as he enlists the help of his true companion[43]

Finally, while Paul does not explicitly enlist the assistance of the entire congregation, it seems to be implied. He reminds the congregation that each person whom he has expressly named as well as those who are co-workers in the gospel have

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[41] Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View," 5.

[42] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 285.

[43] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 284.

their names written in the book of life. By doing so Paul highlights not only their accountability to God but also their collective accountability. Hansen notes this reference has both eschatological and contemporary implications for the congregation.

> The citizens of the Roman colony of Philippi who have their names recorded in a civic register of citizens know that they have a duty to live in harmony and peace with one another. The citizens of the colony of heaven in the Roman colony of Philippi who have their names written in the book of life in heaven are called by their Lord above all powers to live in peace with one another.[44]

Application

The conflict between Euodia and Syntyche as well as the implications for the congregation at Philippi demonstrate that Christians are not impervious to life's challenges to unity. The inevitable conflict that will arise in relationships, our challenges with our sin nature, and the difficulties of life's circumstances while in the flesh make each of us sure candidates for our unity to be opposed, Our love for God, commitment to Christ nor does our submission to the Holy Spirit render any one of us immune to the subtle contamination of self-interests which left unchecked can have far-reaching negative ramifications, particularly, disunity. Disunity, however, is antithetical to God's Triune Existence. As Seamands contends God, Himself exists in unity within the community of the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[45] Disunity is also antithetical to the cause for which Jesus was manifested, lived, died, and was resurrected – for humanity to be in fellowship with God and one another. As Paul charges Peter, Barnabas

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[44] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 286.

[45] Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 34.

and others who acted in a divisive manner, this conduct is not in step with the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14).

From the beginning of this epistle, Paul has reminded the Philippians of their triangular partnership between themselves, Paul, and the Lord to advance the gospel – the call of the Church Universal. Disunity disrupts our ability to effectively contribute to that partnership. Instead of the synergy that is achieved through faithful submission to the Holy Spirit in unity, in disunity, we fail to avail ourselves of that divine enablement in favor of weakened, isolated efforts. Again, this type of ministry is inconsistent and incongruent with God's nature and pattern of behavior as revealed in scripture.

Therefore, while episodes of disunity may be a reality, this passage helps us to understand as Christians it is incumbent for us to be of one mind and to labor in assisting others who name Christ as Lord to do the same. If we are to demonstrate our partnership in the gospel it must be articulated by our actions in the context of unity that reflects Jesus Christ, our Eternal Exemplar.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and Churches of Christ (*acapella*) now exist as separate robust denominations in the United States and around the world. However, each of these denominations began in the late eighteenth century as a single indigenous religious movement, referred to by those within these denominations as the Restoration Movement.[1] Though the movement has since deviated from the intent of its founders and early participants, it began as an effort to unify believers in Christ by prioritizing their faith in Christ above creeds, doctrines, traditions, and all else that would hinder their fellowship.

Ancient History

Though many adherents of Christianity romanticize the first century church, a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals the church was riddled with issues from its beginnings. Less than one hundred years after the ascension of Jesus, disagreements over the acceptance and practices of Gentile believers, the sufficiency of Christ for salvation, and deviation from the moral norms of Christianity all plagued the early church. These

[1] Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity:A History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati,OH: Standard Publishing Company, 1990), 9.

issues were compounded by the introduction of false doctrine by teachers motivated by their self-interests who began to pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-9).
Under Roman influence, despite persecution fueled by individuals such Emperor Nero, Christianity grew. In 313 AD, Roman general turned emperor, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, outlawing religious persecution. When Constantine relocated the capital from Rome to Constantinople, only the bishop of Rome wielded enough spiritual and secular leadership to fill the ensuing power vacuum and eventually Christianity became the official religion of the empire under Theodosius. The decline and eventual collapse of the Roman Empire provided occasion for the church in Rome to rise to even greater prominence in Western Europe. By 600 AD the head of the Roman church was no longer a bishopric but a papacy to which kings and authorities, as well as the eastern churches, were expected to submit. This demand created a conflict between Western and Eastern orthodoxy. A long history of both theological and political issues contributed to disputes, which led to the leaders of these factions functioning independently by 1054 AD.[2]

Corruption and abuses of power and authority continued in the Roman Catholic church until it was confronted by a young monk named Martin Luther on October 31, 1517. Hoping for reform and that the Church would become more closely aligned with scripture, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses, a list of grievances against the Church, on the doors of the church at Wittenberg. The movement reluctantly initiated by Luther eventually led others to break away from Catholicism and establish the Lutheran Church which eventually inspired the Protestant Reformation.

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[2] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of Reformation* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 295.

The rise of the printing press also contributed to the success of the Lutheran revolt. The dissemination of Luther's ideas encouraged and gave rise to other reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin – author of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, one of the most influential theological works of the Reformation.[3] As time went on, theological as well as personal differences were the impetus for several denominations in Europe including Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Anglicans, and others. Even within these denominations, there were also factions. Religious division seemed to become an indelible part of the fabric of society.

The norms of religious division also extended into the culture of the New World as people emigrated from Europe, bringing with them their preferences, interpretations of scripture, and expedients. It is this context into which the early leaders, whom this work shall explore, were thrust. Their desire to witness and encourage the fellowship of believers irrespective of sectarian ideology inconsistent with scripture gave rise to what they deemed a reformation aimed at unity. They believed this unity was the prayer of Jesus Himself as recorded in John 17:20-23, which reads:

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

[3] Dayton Hartman, *Church History for Modern Ministry: Why Our Past Matters for Everything We Do* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 29.

Barton Stone

Many of those outside the Reformation Movement, refer to it as the Stone-Campbell Movement. The nomenclature itself suggests the importance and prominence of Stone to the movement. While multiple persons could be named as founders of the movement including Thomas Campbell, Walter Scott, James O' Kelly, and Rice Haggard, however, if only one person is named as a founder that would be Barton Stone.[4]

Barton Stone was born in Port Tobacco, Maryland on December 24, 1772. Stone lost his father early in life, however there is ambiguity about the quality of his childhood thereafter. Historians differ. Some suggest that wealth was not by any means indicative of Stone's upbringing.[5] However, others suggest that Stone's father left the family "sixteen slaves, various livestock and other possessions" which infers though the family was not rich, they did qualify as a middle-class family.[6] These assets initially helped Stone's mother to provide for his schooling but were depleted before he could finish. However, Stone's determination to complete his education and a good reputation allowed him to finish school based on a promise to pay later.

Though Stone would eventually go on to study theology, he initially spurned the field. It was a sermon by James McGready, a fire and brimstone preacher, that first convicted Stone of his sinfulness and need for God. It was, however, the preaching of

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[4] Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: The Story of the American Restoration Movement* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1981), 71.

[5] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 71.

[6] Micheal Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement* (Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 37.

William Hodge, a Presbyterian minister, coupled with further study and fervent prayer that compelled Stone to submit to Christ.[7]

Stone continued to vacillate about his call, partly because of a lack of assurance as well as his confusion about various subjects, specifically the Trinity. Much of the thinking of the leaders of the Restoration Movement was influenced by individuals key to the Enlightenment such as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locke.[8] These men espoused logical conclusions, one of which Locke concluded was the reasonableness of the Christian faith.[9] In fact, Locke opined Christianity was the most rational of all faiths.[10] The doctrine of the Trinity contradicted the rational reasoning of Stone. He was baffled by what he reasoned was the ideology of three separate gods, when he considered that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were to be worshipped. Though encouraged by others to study further, Stone wrestled with the doctrine of the Trinity. Initially, Stone was influenced by the writings of Wistius which implied the Trinitarian doctrine was the worship of three gods which was unreconcilable to Stone.[11] However, he later consulted the works of Isaac Watts. Watts taught that scripture revealed the same Godhead belonged to the Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct "persons" so far as it was reasonable to

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[7] D. Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 2000), 27.

[8] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 39 and 61.

[9] C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes. *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), 78

[10] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 241.

[11] Douglas A. Foster, D. Newell Williams, Paul M. Blowers, and Dr. Paul M. Blowers. *Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (Nashville, TN: Chalise Press, 2013), 11.

say and to worship each as a member of the Triune Godhead.[12] When faced with the question at his ordination as he was confronted by the Westminster Confession of Faith, Stone replied that he accepted the doctrine of the Trinity insofar as it was in alignment with revealed scripture.[13]

Already a bourgeoning reformer, Stone was significantly influenced by the Cane Ridge Revival and its emanating effects. Such revivals were part of an evangelical tradition in the Presbyterian Church originating in Scotland; however, Cane Ridge was different. First, the revival at Cane Ridge was ecumenical. It brought together clergy from multiple denominations.[14] As many as forty clergymen, despite their differing creeds or doctrines, worked collectively to evangelize during this frontier revival.[15] The responses and reactions of those in attendance were also different. Most unique to Stone was the nature of the singing and its delivering effects. He noted that the singing was guttural and seemed to originate from heaven though Hines disagrees, leaving individuals in a state that would be currently described as slain in the Spirit.[16] Moreover, Stone reflects, many of these persons were subsequently delivered.

The Cane Ridge Revival sparked a newfound appreciation for the impact of the Christian faith on people's lives. It would also strengthen Stone's perspective on the unity of believers in a roundabout way. Though the revival catalyzed much-needed spiritual

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[12] Foster, et al., *Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, 11.

[13] Barton W. Stone and John Rogers, *Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone* (Cincinnati, OH: J.A. and U.P. James, 1847), 30.

[14] John Young, *Visions of Restoration: The History of Churches of Christ* (Florence, AL: Cypress Publications, 2019), 14.

[15] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 74.

[16] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 43.

renewal and numerical growth, the activities of Cane Ridge also drew opposition from the orthodox Presbyterian establishment in the region. The revival, through its inclusion of other groups, hinted at anti-Calvinism which was met with disapproval from staunch Presbyterians. Consequently, investigations were initiated into two pastors – Richard McNemar and John Thompson. Before they could be officially censured McNemar and Thompson withdrew from the Kentucky Synod. Joined by Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, and Stone, these men submitted a protest to the Synod that would be included in *The Apology of the Springfield Presbytery*. This document asserted freedom for ecclesiastical oversight and control and emphasized individuals' rights to base their faith on their free interpretation of the scriptures – a serious departure from orthodox Presbyterian practices, though allowed by the *Confession of Faith*.[17]

Interestingly, though these men no longer considered themselves under the jurisdiction of the Kentucky Synod, they did not wish to sever fellowship. This sentiment is observed as they include in their written protest the following statement:

> Our affection for you, as brethren in the Lord, is, and we hope shall ever be the same: nor do we desire to separate from your communion, or to exclude you from ours. We ever wish to forbear, in the matters of human order, or opinion, and unite our joint supplications with yours for the increasing effusions of that divine Spirit, which is held in the bond of peace.[18]

It was not the intent of Stone and his colleagues to be separatists. They desired to continue fellowship while remaining free to interpret the scriptures for themselves.[19] Evidently, they thought it possible to maintain unity in Christ as their collective Savior,

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[17] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 77.

[18] Barton W. Stone and John Rogers, *Biography*, 171.

[19] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 78.

even while differing on matters of doctrine and polity. Unfortunately, the Kentucky Synod did not share the sentiments of Stone. After unsuccessful attempts to reclaim the dissidents, the Synod proceed to suspend them from fellowship, declaring their pulpits vacant.[20]

The decision of the Synod to sever its relationship with the protesting members resulted in those men beginning the Springfield Presbytery. The nomenclature affirmed their desire to remain a part of the Presbyterian denomination. The Presbytery would be short-lived, however. The members of the fledgling presbytery decided they did not wish to contribute to further divisions within the Lord's Church. For Stone personally, it meant resigning the contract to preach for his congregation, thus forfeiting his salary. Stone was also convicted to release the slave he owned, perhaps because of a new perspective of freedom. Whatever the case, he was at a significant disadvantage financially but finally free spiritually.[21]

Collectively, upon determining to dissolve the Presbytery, its members drafted another document, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. While the document was previously less known than others the Reformation Movement holds dear, however, its language provides a glimpse into the ethos these men desired to perpetuate among God's people. We observe this language in the following statements included in the *Last Will*:

> We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling." "We will, that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one." "We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit,

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[20] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 77.

[21] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 79.

> choose her own preacher, and support him by a free-will offering, without a written call or subscription admit members remove offenses; and never henceforth delegate her right of government to any man or set of men whatever."
> We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven…for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.[22]

The document closes with an appeal for all Christians to practice mutual love and to work for the unity of the people of God. Again, it is apparent that these men are moving toward a Christian ethic that is inclusive of all those who name Jesus as their sufficient Savior. Although the group's impetus was an endeavor of freedom, the focus of those who would continue developed into an enterprise aimed at Christian unity. Later Stone and his followers joined others who had begun a similar endeavor.[23]

Thomas Campbell

Thomas Campbell was born in County Down, Ireland on February 1, 1763. Campbell's family encouraged his educational pursuits. His early education included military school near the family home in Newry.[24] He also spent three years at Glasgow. Through Campbell's study at Glasgow University, he was introduced to teachings from Common Sense Realism of the Enlightenment which included thinkers such as John Locke.[25] This teaching would influence Campbell throughout his ministry. Hines writes:

> John Locke's writings also left a lasting impact on Campbell. He found Locke's *Letters Concerning Toleration* especially interesting. Locke urged toleration, not

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[22] Barton W. Stone and Richard McNemar. "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery (1804)." In *Foundational and Controversial Stone-Campbell Movement Documents.* https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/all_foundationaldocuments, n.d.

[23] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 173.

[24] Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 67.

[25] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 58.

> only by the state [which controlled religion] toward dissenting groups, but also by the church toward varieties of theological opinion. Campbell also devoured Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* and ultimately made both books required reading for Alexander, his eldest son.[26]

Finding the Presbyterian Church more suited for him than the Anglican Church in which he had been reared, Campbell was also influenced to enroll and spend five years at a seminary of the Presbyterian sect to which he now belonged – the Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church. With time, like most denominations, the Presbyterians experienced internal conflict which eventually resulted in their division into four distinct sects. Each sect was adamant about excluding the others' fellowship or recognition.[27] While Campbell found himself in a sectarian ethos, he did not conform totally to this ideology or practice. To no avail, after returning to Ireland to minister, he challenged church authorities to end the factions, which he believed were contrary to scripture. Despite his lack of success, he was undeterred and became more intent on facilitating unity. Campbell worked diligently toward this endeavor. He started a school to supplement his income, and no doubt used his position of influence to impress upon his students his conviction of God's intent for unity among God's people.

Ultimately Thomas Campbell's health demanded respite. At the encouragement of his physician, and no doubt similar actions by many of his friends, he set sail for North America. Having planned for his family to join him later, Campbell intended to rest. Ironically, he continued his vocation when he arrived in America.[28]

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[26] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement,* 61.

[27] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 100.

[28] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 100.

Campbell initially settled in the southwestern region of Pennsylvania. Though Irish-Presbyterian immigrants favored this area not many were of Campbell's sect. Though many were immigrating from their old countries into a new world, they maintained their sectarian ideology. Though Campbell himself was progressive regarding fellowship, he found the American frontier even more divided than Scotland. However, with the scarcity of ordained clergy, believers could not regularly receive communion. This ethos soon proved problematic for Campbell. Resurfacing was his proclivity as a reformer and one who leaned toward open fellowship which had been an aspect of Campbell's thinking even before he migrated to the New World. Though Campbell was a Presbyterian, he had many friends and supporters among other faiths who agreed with his opposition to the sectarian practices within his denomination.[29] It was not necessarily the doctrine to which he was opposed, but rather the assertion that "any religious theories or opinions" other than scriptures could be the foundation of Christian practice.[30] When Campbell's religious posture began to manifest this mindset in the New World, questions began to arise concerning his allegiance and adherence to the parameters of his sect especially when he served communion to Presbyterians of other sects.[31]

Charges were levied against Campbell for breaking the protocols of his sect. He was thus suspended by his presbytery though the decision was later overturned by the Synod when Campbell appealed.[32] Though Campbell had been reinstated by the Synod,

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[29] Alexander Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell: Together with a Brief Memoir of Mrs. Jane Campbell* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018), 10.

[30] Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell: Together with a Brief Memoir of Mrs. Jane Campbell*, 11.

[31] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 100.

[32] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 63.

the relationship with his presbytery still held him in thinly veiled contempt. They resisted him and remained uncooperative and unwilling to give him preaching assignments.[33] Eventually, Campbell withdrew from his presbytery and established an ecumenical Bible study fellowship in his home that became the Christian Association of Washington.[34]

The Association was patterned after the missionary societies of Britain, and in Campbell's mind would not rival congregations. It was never Campbell's intent to establish a church or similar religious organization. Instead, what Campbell envisioned was a group of believers working within their various congregations to promote and facilitate reformation from division in favor of the unity of believers.[35] To this end, a document was produced by Campbell that explained the Association's organizational structure, intent, and means of support. Hines avers that the document, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington*, is considered by historians as one of the most important in American Christianity regarding unity among Christians.[36] Citing the importance of the document, Hines provides the following outline of its propositions:

I. Focus on the Church
   a. Proposition 1- It is essential for the church to be one to accomplish its purpose. The church is composed of individuals not congregations.
   b. Proposition 2 - The church assembles as congregations: gatherings of individuals.
1. Proposition 3 - Christians are those who obey God.

II. Focus on the Bible
   a. Proposition 4 - There is a distinction between the Old and New Testaments
2. although there is a connection.

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[33] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 101.

[34] Gary Holloway and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing God's People: A Concise History of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2001), 41.

[35] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 64.

[36] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 64.

b. Proposition 5 - There are issues where the New Testament has spoken and issues where it has not.
c. Proposition 6 - In areas where the Scripture is unclear, interpretations based on deductions from those sections must not be made a test of fellowship.
d. Proposition 7 - Creeds or statements of faith may be helpful but they should not be made tests of fellowship.

III. Focus on Conversion
a. Proposition 8 - Two recognitions by each individual are necessary to become a Christian: (1) That he is a sinner. (2) That Jesus is the answer to the problem.
b. Proposition 9 - A profession of faith and obedience to all God's commands makes a person a Christian; the individual does not need to know or understand everything to be a Christian.

IV. Focus on the Reasons for Division
a. Proposition 10 - Division is a sin!
b. Proposition 11 - Two reasons exist for religious division: (1) Not preaching the whole Word of God. (2) Preaching more than the Word of God.

V. Focus on the Solutions to Division
a. Proposition 12 - None is to be received as a member but who understand what is said in Propositions 8 and 9; none retrained in fellowship when their lives do not reflect what they profess.
b. Proposition 13 - Recognize that helpful things are just helpful; they are necessary to salvation.[37]

Campbell's document clearly articulated the organization's intent on unity; however, the leaders of the members' respective congregations were not amicable to the association's presence or agenda. Left with little choice, the association formed a congregation that provided them the freedom to worship based on their principles and how they believed scripture instructed them to engage other Christians despite their doctrinal or practical differences.[38]

[37] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 66-67.

[38] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 69.

Alexander Campbell

In the fall of 1808, Alexander Campbell and the Campbell family boarded a ship in Ireland; prepared to sail to the New World to meet his father, Thomas. Alexander had been left in charge as the man of the house when his father left. Before the elder Campbell left, he had inculcated within his son a posture of intellectual curiosity, appreciation for knowledge, and the discipline of study. This would prove to be important for the trajectory of the younger Campbell's life. A shipwreck delayed and detained the Campbells in Glasgow for ten months. The importunity, however, began Alexander on a course that would cause him to take a spiritual posture much like his father's, which at the time was unbeknownst to them both.[39]

In Glasgow, Alexander met Granville Ewing, a Haldanean minister who introduced him to the works of Glas and Sandeman, members of the Independent religious movement.[40] John Glas was an early proponent of autonomously governed churches. Glas would eventually break away from the Church of Scotland, advocating for churches to reject creeds, and be guided only by scripture, specifically the New Testament, a reflection of the passion to "restore New Testament Christianity."[41] Robert Sandeman was the son-in-law of Glas and perhaps the most skilled leader in the movement. Notably, the first documented churches in America to bear the name Church of Christ are linked directly to Sandeman.[42]

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[39] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 71.

[40] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 70.

[41] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 38.

[42] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 39.

The Haldanes were also intentional in their endeavor to restore the primitive practice of Christianity. The Haldanes, incidentally, had also influenced Thomas, Alexander's father.[43] They agreed with Glas and Sandeman that the scriptures were authoritative and sufficient. They called for weekly communion and congregations ruled by a plurality of elders. Likewise, they made no distinct clergy class or denominational alliance seeing themselves as Christians only, but they differed in that they believed in the baptism of adults only by immersion.[44] These men and their beliefs to which Campbell was exposed through Ewing, left an enduring imprint on the thinking of Alexander Campbell, creating within him the seedbed from which further inclinations of reform would sprout.[45]

Certainly, Alexander would have these teachings lingering when it came time to receive communion. At that time to qualify for participation, individuals who were not members of the local Presbyterian Church would be examined. Satisfactory completion of the examination afforded receipt of a token indicating they were doctrinally pure and could receive the elements of communion.[46] When the time came for Campbell to receive communion, however, he without fanfare "quietly refused."[47] He, like his father, had all but left the Presbyterian Church.

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[43] Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1897), 69.

[44] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 41.

[45] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 70.

[46] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 71.

[47] Gary Holloway and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing God's People: A Concise History of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2001), 45.

The family again set sail for America on July 31, 1809, and after a tumultuous trip anchored in New York harbor on September 28, 1809. The family spent a week in New York and set out to meet the elder Campbell. Three days from their destination of Washington, Pennsylvania, Alexander, and the family met Thomas.[48] It was a joyous reunion. Still, both father and son wondered what the other would think concerning their religious transitions. It was a comfort to them both to learn they shared common ground and thus had an ally in one another.[49]

Originally Alexander and his father hoped to maintain fellowship with other Christians, specifically their Presbyterian brethren. However, because the Christian Association of Washington did not esteem creeds, and the authoritative rules of the Synod regarding licensure of clergy the Campbells and the Association were rejected. Subsequently, on May 4, 1811, the Brush Run Church came into existence with four deacons, Thomas as an elder with Alexander licensed to preach.[50]

In 1812, a year after Alexander and his wife Margaret were married their daughter Jane was born. This fueled an already extant debate within the congregation concerning baptism which both Alexander and his father minimized.[51] Some in the congregation had questioned the validity of their baptism of sprinkling as infants and refused to accept communion.[52] When Jane was born, Campbell could no longer ignore the question. He

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[48] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 122-124.

[49] John Young, *Visions of Restoration: The History of the Churches of Christ* (Florence. AL: Cypress Publications, 2019), 15.

[50] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 73.

[51] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 126.

[52] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 74.

needed to study the question in depth to answer the question. After fervent study, he concluded that baptism was not scripturally sanctioned for infants and was to be received by believers only. Campbell then solicited a Baptist minister in June 1812, Matthias Luce to baptize both Campbells, their wives, and their three others in the church. This led to most members of the church being immersed.[53]

Their new position on believers only being proper candidates and immersion as a mode of baptism supported scripturally, made the Brush Run Church virtually identical to any Baptist church. The Campbells began preaching in various churches in the Baptist faith. With considerable prayer and conversation, the church joined the Red Stone Baptist Association.[54] Denominational alliance, on the surface, may seem counter-productive to the Campbells' endeavor for Christian unity. However, they believed that was a tangible advance toward that goal. Holloway and Foster aver:

> For the next fifteen years, the Campbells were reformers among the Baptists. Soon their followers planted new congregations in addition to the Brush Run Church. Alexander Campbell became influential through his work as an educator, publisher, and debater. From 1818-1823 he educated young men for the ministry in his home. In 1823, he began a monthly periodical, the *Christian Baptist*. The tone of the paper was iconoclastic, attacking traditional institutions, particularly the power of the clergy. Alexander was determined to tear down every practice that stood in the way of restoring New Testament Christianity and the unity of the early church.[55]

Sadly, Alexander Campbell's growing influence, notoriety, and particularly a sermon that made a tangible distinction between the Old and New Testament drew the fire of some Red Stone Baptist Association members, leading Campbell and the congregation to join

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[53] Holloway and Foster, *Renewing God's People*, 47.

[54] Hines, *History of the American Restoration Movement*, 75.

[55] Holloway and Foster, *Renewing God's People*, 48.

the Mahoning Association. However, this union was also soon dissolved due to Campbell's perception of the dictatorial posture of the clergy. He became increasingly opposed to the distinction of clergy class. Furthermore, his beliefs about the significance of baptism as the moment when God forgives the sins of believers placed him at odds with other Baptists. He ultimately determined that he, too must become independent.

The Movements Converge

The Restoration Movement first known as the Stone-Campbell Movement was the fifth-largest Christian body within the United States in the 1870 census. According to some estimates, in the 1850s it was the fastest-growing religious group in the nation.[56] This is due at least in part to the convergence of two dynamic movements.

Barton Stone had a profound appreciation for Alexander Campbell. He remarked of Campbell that of any man living, he was the greatest preacher of the restoration.[57] The two met for the first time in 1824. Though they often disagreed they remained in enduring conversation in person or by correspondence. It was this friendship, according to Stone, that allowed for the union of their respective movements.[58]

There was discussion as early as the 1820s of the movement uniting. The Stone group was simply called Christians. Campbell's group favored being called Disciples. Though Stone asserted that the two groups were one in spirit in his paper the *Christian*

[56] Young, *Visions of Restoration*, 21.

[57] Barton W. Stone and John Rogers, *Biography*, 76.

[58] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 82.

Messenger and that visible unity would not be problematic, there were differences even beyond the groups' names.[59]

One major difference was the two group's posture on open fellowship which was a manifestation of their respective understanding and emphasis on baptism. At issue was whether individuals who had not been baptized could partake in communion. Though both men believed in baptism by immersion, only Campbell, specifically in his earlier years, made it a test of fellowship. Stone encouraged patience for those who were reluctant to accept the necessity of baptism by immersion.[60]

There were other differences between the two groups. One of the most apparent differences was worship styles. The Stone group was "emotionally expressive while the Campbell churches were rational and dignified."[61] There were also economic differences with Stone's group consisting of poorer families while Campbell's followers consisted of wealthier and educated families.

Despite the marked differences, however, the two groups were able to unite. The union, though no longer extant, was a real union that remained intact for more than seventy years. This is evidence, according to Holloway and Foster, that unity may not always be expressed in a physical merger. Rather, the willingness to love one another, to be forbearing, to be patient with one another's imperfections, while prioritizing our common body, Spirit, Lord, faith, and baptism, God and Father is the crux of unity.[62]

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[59] Holloway and Foster, *Renewing God's People*, 55.

[60] Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 83.

[61] Holloway and Foster, *Visions of Restoration*, 60.

[62] Holloway and Foster, *Visions of Restoration*, 61.

Application and Conclusion

Though the Restoration Movement has since splintered into several factions, the original desire of the founding pioneers for Christian unity is undeniable. Not only did these men and the unnamed women who supported them and participated with them desire unity, but they worked tirelessly to manifest the unity of believers established by God through the atoning work of Jesus and the agency of the Holy Spirit.

The rapid growth of the movement, particularly when it converged, I believe, is evidence of the holy synergy, born of the Spirit, to which Christians avail ourselves when we work in community, and minister according to God's design. This is the spirit of the biblical foundation Philippians 4:2-3 where Christian leaders are encouraged to set aside differences that jeopardize the unity of believers, thus negatively impacting their collective witness and efficacy in spreading the gospel.

Therefore, may we take the positive lessons of the spiritual pioneers and as scripture commands endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit. May we also learn from the mistakes of the past and instead set differences aside, for the glory of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Does God truly care about the affairs of the humans that He has commanded to devote to God's self the place of preeminence in their lives? Is He impacted at all by their circumstances, feelings, failures, or successes? This is the question that relational theology seeks to consider and in fact answer with a resounding yes. Moreover, if one ascribes to the perspective that God is in relation with His creation, then we can safely assume that our Exemplar God, also expects those who follow Him to be in relationship with one another. Failing to do so, according to John, calls into question our relationship with God Himself. We read in 1 John 4:20, "Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." Again, it is apparent that God is concerned about the relationships of those within the faith community. This relational thrust demonstrates God's nature as He exists within the Godhead community – the Triune existence of Father, Son, and Spirit. The Trinity is fundamentally and unequivocally "interpersonal and indivisible," living in interpersonal oneness having made humans in His image to live fundamentally similar.[1] So, as we contemplate theologically studying God's nature, behaviors, and intentions, clearly there is a relational

[1] Wesley M. Pinkham and Jeremiah Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity: A Remarkable Vision of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022), xxix.

aspect. Still, there is difficulty in precisely defining relational theology, though the term is used in both the academy and the Church.

Relational theology has its roots in various Christian theological perspectives, including the Wesleyan tradition. Its emphasis is the engaging nature of God, especially in the context of His relationship with humanity.[2] From a relational perspective and in this context, God is considered genuinely loving, authentically interpersonal, compassionate honest, and forthright in affording human volition. This contrasts with the Calvinistic perspective of God who is viewed as static in His relationships and predeterminate in His engagement of humanity.[3]

We note that the relational perspective of God is not novel. While we are careful not to overstate John Wesley's perspective of God, it is in many ways like the current understanding of God. Wesley was instrumental in moving thoughts of God from distant to intimate and from static to dynamic. He offered an improved way of reading scripture that focused on a biblical rather than philosophical view of God. As Pinnock asserts, Wesley's focus on God:

> Was not so much on God as creator, judge, and king, with the emphasis on divine control and unchangability, as it was on God as saviour, lover, and friend, with the emphasis on relationality and response-ability. He viewed God not as a unilateral power that takes no risks, but as a bilateral power which gives creatures room. He reads the story of redemption as a genuine dialogue, not a monologue where God would be the only one responsible for anything.[4]

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[2] Barry L Callen, "John Wesley and Relational Theology," In *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction,* eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas J. Oord, and Karen Winslow (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 7.

[3] Callen, "John Wesley and Relational Theology," 7.

[4] Charles H. Pinnock, "The Beauty of God: John Wesley's Reform and Its Aftermath," *Wesleyan Theological Society* (Fall 2003), 58.

God's Relationship with God's Self

Wesley's perspective and our effort to understand God's relationality compel examination of the personhood of God. Why? It is impossible to properly conceptualize relationships without adequate consideration of the persons involved. In their book *Relational Christianity*, Pinkham and Gruenburg identify two concepts that are important to our understanding of the nature of God and the lived Christian experience – the relationally dynamic personhood of God which is epitomized in the Trinity;[5] and that this nature is revealed in the incarnate Christ. Nancy Pearcey contends "the Rosetta Stone of Christian social thought is the Trinity."[6] When we examine God's existence in the community, we gain greater appreciation for His relationality.

We derive much of our conceptualization of the Trinity originally from the Eastern Church which framed the work of God as Creator, Redeemer, Tranfigurer. These are distinct activities that were ascribed to a hypostasis, each analogous to a person.[7] This thinking was amended by Augustine who viewed God as "one person within whose interior life a three-fold distinction can be made."[8] Within this divine community there is intimacy, fellowship, and communion – all of which go beyond action and are fundamental to God's very identity. Pinkham and Gruenburg describe the nature of God is "onto-relational" in terms of communion, meaning the identity of each member of the

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[5] Pinkham and Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity*, 36.

[6] Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 132.

[7] John B. Cobb, "The Relativization of the Trinity," In *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, eds. Joseph A Bracken and Marjorie Suchocki (London, UK: Bloomberg Academic, 1997), 4.

[8] Cobb, *The Relativization of the Trinity*, 5.

Godhead is inextricably tied to the other members and furthermore their relationship is communal personal rather than mechanistic individualistic. They contend in contrast to the prevailing thoughts of the Greek philosophers in the New Testament era the truth of the Trinity requires that our perspective of God is to be as unequivocally relational.[9] Further, McGrath views the Triune God as a "community of being, in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them."[10] This is closely akin to the Southern African concept unbuntu which literally means humanity but conceptually describes personhood. Unbuntu is a concept of personhood or identity that crystalizes the thought umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a person is a person through other persons).[11] We shall explore this more in-depth later. However, as applied to the Trinity unbuntu helps to frame that the core understanding of the personhood of God is in the context of the Trinity. Namely, God's identity is that of "shared being: the persons do not simply enter relations with one another but are constituted by one another in the relations. Father. Son and Spirit are eternally what they are under what they are from and to one another."[12]

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[9] Pinkham and Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity*, 37.

[10] Alister E McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 325.

[11] Dion A. Forster, "African Relational Ontology, Individual Identity and Christian Theology," *Theology*, vol 113, number 874 (July 2010), 245.

[12] Colin E. Gunton, *The One, Three, and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 214.

God's Relationship with Humans

What then is the most profound characteristic of God in terms of His relational self? Quoting Campbell, Holtzen writes, ""God is love,' is the most soul-subduing proposition ever propounded to a fallen world…. There is not in the universe a more positive, a more substantive, a more real existence than love; for God is love.""[13] It can also be said that God is holy. God is eternal. God is patient. However, God's attributes are not jeopardized or suspended the others. This is how a holy God can still love relationally sinful humanity and use His love to transform us. We can trust God's love "because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning, because He is eternal. His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limit; because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity."[14] The love of God is thus transformative because it is a love that compels reciprocation but does not coerce it. While God desires that we love him and demonstrates that desire through loving acts, God even in his sovereignty cannot guarantee that love will be returned. This is one of the caveats of any true loving relationship, the willingness to risks on account of love.[15]

While God's relational love is most apparently communicated in Jesus, as discussed later, it would be irresponsible to minimize His displays of love and the examples of His relationships with humanity from the Hebrew scriptures. A frequent reference to God is made in the Hebrew scripture using the word panim which means

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[13] William Curtis Holtzen, *The God Who Trusts: A Relational Theology of Divine Faith, Hope, and Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 62.

[14] A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009), 98.

[15] Tim Reddish, "A Practical Exploration of a Revolutionary Partnership," in *Partnering With God: Exploring Collaboration in Open and Relational Theology*, eds. Tim Reddish, Bonnie Rambob, Fran Stedman, and Thomas Jay Ooord (Grasmere, ID: SacraSage, 2021), 103.

face. This word is especially key in understanding God's engagement with humanity because it "refers to real presence, relationship, and meeting (or refusing to meet)."[16] We initially observe this interaction between God and humanity in the Book of Genesis. "God created man in his own image" Genesis 1:27. While there are scholarly debates regarding the exact meaning of the image Duvall and Hays point to a relational understanding. They cite several authors to buttress their contention that the relational nature of God is inherent not only in God's creation of man but also in the identity of humanity is fundamentally built on the foundation of a relationship with God.[17]

In the Garden of Eden, God related to humanity by providing purpose, shelter, fellowship, and intimacy. It is implied that both Adam and Eve had access and communion with God. However, when they allowed the serpent to influence them to break God's commandment to refrain from eating from the tree in the Garden, their relationship with God was altered. No longer did they have unfettered access to God the way they once did. While we often focus on Adam and Eve, God is impacted as well because He, too, desired to be in continuous fellowship, which is an uninhibited relationship with humanity. Still, though the relationship is altered, God's love is not, and we begin to observe from the scriptures God's love God's relatedness in action to restore His fellowship with humanity.

This love and relatedness of God is observed through God's enlistment of covenant partners. Covenant partners are individuals documented in scripture whom God

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[16] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hayes, *God's Relational Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2019), 14.

[17] Duvall and Hayes 2019, *God's Relational Presence*, 17.

used and relied upon to produce and preserve a people through whom God could deliver salvation to the world.[18] Scripture is replete with individuals who willingly cooperate with God and participate in God's holy initiative. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Saul. David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others partnered with God. Moreover, their actions or inaction, their responsiveness or rebellion, their faith, and their fears impacted God. When they relied on God in humility, they pleased Him. They disappointed God, however, in their pride and pursuit of their proclivities. When they "honored their relationships with God, they helped create a nation with whom God could dwell and through whom God could bless the entire world. When they broke the covenant, they wreaked havoc for their people who were eventually expelled from the land, but never from God's loving presence."[19]

Beginning in Genesis chapter twelve, we observe God's covenant with Abraham which continues with the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob. As Duvall and Hays convey, the promise God originally gave to Abraham of prosperity – land, descendants, and protection - God extends to each of the patriarchs. What is most emphasized, however, is God's relational presence, first observed through the myriad theophanic interactions that take place.[20]

Moses emerged as a typological preview of Christ and was perhaps God's most intimate Old Testament covenant partner. From Exodus 33:11ff we read, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned

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[18] Karen Strand Winslow, "Cooperative Covenant Partners in the Bible," 2012), in *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction,* eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas J. Oord, and Karen Winslow (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 49.

[19] Winslow, *Cooperative Covenant Partners in the Bible*, 50.

[20] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 21.

again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent." Again, we read in Numbers 12:5ff,

> And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord."

God lovingly and patiently interacted with Moses despite Moses' flawed humanity. He invested Himself in the face of disappointment. At the risk of unrequited love, God loved Moses face-to-face. Even while considering Moses' initial reluctance and the offering of his numerous excuses and disappointing actions, Moses typifies the gravely unequal yet profound ways that these personalities of the Hebrew scriptures partnered in covenant with God.[21]

The Demonstration of God's Relationality in Christ

The greatest risk, however, and the most profound act of relational love of the Father was giving His Son for fallen humanity. Myriad passages in scripture document the magnitude of God's love displayed in this gift. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." According to 1 John 4:9-10, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Perhaps the passage that indicates God's continuous love is demonstrated in Jesus' sacrifice is Romans 5:8, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In this passage "shows"

[21] Winslow, *Cooperative Covenant Partners in the Bible*, 51.

is in the present tense inferring that the demonstration of love has current implications. Though God demonstrates the profundity of His love for humankind through Jesus Christ's death, it is necessary to explore how God's relatedness to humanity is communicated through the life of Christ Jesus.

Given that the identities of each person within the Trinity are foundational to understanding the others we must ask how this informs our knowledge of Christ. To explore God the Father's relationality to humanity through Christ we must first understand Christ's relatedness to the Father. Speaking of Christ, Colossians 2:9 reads "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." In John 14:9 Jesus is quoted as saying "…Whoever has seen me has seen the Father…" In this way, the person of Christ reflects God the Father's person and thus the concept of the Trinitarian personhood will elucidate the relational perspective of Christology.[22]

The relationship of Christ to the Father is most apparently revealed in communicating with God, particularly in His prayer life.[23] In his purpose, in regarding praise, in his pain, and in his passion, Jesus was always intimate and honest and in congruence with the Father. We observe congruence in purpose in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." Regarding praise, we observe Jesus' relation to the Father in John 8:50, "Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge." In Christ's pain we see honesty in Matthew 26:39, "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will,

[22] Pinkham and Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity*, 45.

[23] Pinkham and Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity*, 45.

but as you will." Finally, in Jesus' passion, He relates to the Father. In Luke 23:46, we read, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last." Throughout Jesus' life
His relationship with the Father is apparent. Jesus was also God the Father's fullest divine disclosure of God's self to engage intimately with humanity.

That God relates to and interacts with humanity through Jesus as the incarnate personal presence of God is observed especially in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts. The relational presence of God through Jesus is foundational to inclusion in the kingdom of God, and the development of righteousness and discipleship to Jesus. Ultimately, the goal of the cross is to bring humanity – at least those who have faith in Christ – back into a relationship with God eternally.[24]

Our understanding of this aim can be elucidated by the Gospel presentation of Jesus. Mark emphatically states Jesus' identity from the beginning of his discourse. In Mark 1:1 we read, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Immediately, Mark shifts to present John the Baptist as a pseudo-Elijah preparing the way for Jesus. John views the work of Jesus as the manifestation of Christ's "person and position (1:7) and defines it as the giving of the Spirit, which is described under the metaphor of a 'baptism' (1:8)."[25] Cole writes, "If John the Baptist is seen by Mark to be the messenger and forerunner prophesied by Isaiah (1:2–3), then Jesus must be directly equated with God, for what was originally described by Isaiah as the coming of Yahweh

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[24] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 167.

[25] R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 66.

is in Mark transferred to the coming of Jesus."[26] In this way, every interaction that Jesus has with humanity – every act of love, compassion, mercy, and rebuke; all of His preaching, teaching, and healing ministry; the discipline of the twelve and Jesus' ultimate sacrifice of Himself – is God relating through Jesus to humanity.

Matthew, through his inclusion of the genealogy of Christ, is intentional to parallel the beginning of heaven and earth with the new beginning of Christ thus conjuring the image of God while simultaneously explicitly connecting Jesus with the Hebrew people.[27] Matthew continues this emphasis on the interconnection between Jesus' identity and mission with God's relational presence establishing that Jesus is not an addendum but rather the intention of God, to which Israel's history has pointed.[28] In John 5:39-40, Jesus implies that the fellowship with God that religious leaders have been searching for through the scripture is in Jesus. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about you, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. In other words, from a scriptural perspective from Genesis chapter three to Revelation chapter twenty-two, God is working to bring humanity back into his loving presence. God desires the same fellowship He enjoyed with Adam in the cool of the day.[29] Matthew notes this in the names of Christ. In 1:21 he writes, "…you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." He further reveals God's relational intent in verse twenty-three, "… and they shall call his

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[26] Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 66.

[27] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 171.

[28] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*,171.

[29] Jamie Moore, *Friendship With God: Discover God's Relational Presence and Receive Peace, Identiry ans Purpose for Your Life* (Topeka, KS: Doxazo, 2021), 17.

name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)." God has come among God's people to save them from their sins to afford them the loving, intimate, satisfying relationship with Him that God intended from the beginning of creation. Pointing to the linguistic grouping of verses 1:21; 1:23 and 1:25, Duvall and Hayes assert the language is such that every time Jesus' name is mentioned readers would remember God's relational presence in the fullest sense – "Jesus as God's Son, is also God Himself with God's people, effecting their deliverance."[30]

The Participation of the Holy Spirit in God's Relationality

Both Matthew and Mark emphasize that Jesus' miracles, healings, exorcisms, preaching, and teaching collectively manifest the fulfillment of God's relational presence with His people. We must be careful to note, however, that the third Person of the Trinity, namely the Holy Spirit, is also involved. At the beginning of His earthly ministry in Luke 4:18-19, Jesus quotes Isaiah chapter sixty-one, signifying the start of His ministry and announcing Himself as the fulfillment of prophecy. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Is. 61:1-2a). Jesus applies this to Himself but is careful to note the activity of the Spirit in this divine initiative. Luke details that before Jesus' announcement, in preparation for ministry, Jesus had been led into the wilderness by the Spirit. Luke 4:1 "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness." Jesus emerges from this

[30] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 172.

preparatory experience empowered by the Spirit and begins to teach in the synagogues. Luke 4:14-15 “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues.” It is in this empowerment of the Spirit that Jesus proclaims the beginning of His ministry and the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of God.

This is not the first instance of the Spirit’s participation in the life of the incarnate God. Included in Luke’s record of Gabriel’s announcement and explanation to Mary of her commission to conceive and bare Jesus, Luke details the Spirit’s activity.
Luke 1:35-36 states, “And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” Also, at the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit is active and affirming. Matthew 3:16 states, “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.” Throughout Jesus’ ministry, the Spirit empowers Him and later the Church to engage and interact with people as God incarnates to demonstrate God’s desire and determination to share God’s relational love with humanity.

God’s Relationality Reflected: The Church

To reiterate the single most loving and demonstrative act of God to show God’s desire and determination to be in relationship with humanity was the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary’s cross. However, God’s engagement does not stop there. Jesus was raised from the dead, ushering in what Duvall and Hayes call the “climactic expression of divine

presence" through Jesus Matthew 28:16-20, but also the continuation of God's relational presence through the Holy Spirit in Acts.[31] In the formation, growth, development, and demonstration of the church, the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit serve respectively as initiator, exemplar, and the One who empowers the Church to reflect God relationally.

After His resurrection, Jesus used faithful women to relay the message to his disciples to meet Him in Galilee, where He had previously instructed they would meet before His crucifixion. According to Matthew 26:31-32 "Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." It is here that Jesus articulates the mandate of the Church to continue and reflect the mission of Christ Himself – to facilitate people's relationship with God by becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus commissions them as covenant partners to participate in this ministry, assuring them of the Triune God's participation and His continuous presence.

Acts 1:1 effectively establishes that Luke and Acts though separated are one treatment of the life of Jesus Christ on both sides of the cross. The Lordship of Jesus, as emphasized by Luke essentially associates Jesus with God such that the exalted Jesus' presence and activity in the Church mirrors God's inherent involvement with Israel. Like Yahweh is present with Israel using various means including His Spirit, in Acts, Luke parallels Jesus' presence in the Church through various means, of which the Holy Spirit is primary.[32]

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[31] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 199.

[32] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 206.

Jesus instructs his disciples that they will be witnesses on His behalf to facilitate others' belief. However, they must wait in Jerusalem for the promise of God – the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized with the Holy Spirit is essentially to be indwelt by the presence of God. In Acts chapter two, the Holy Spirit engages believers who are present. The presence is not merely functional and missional; it is relational as the "Spirit plays a vital role in communicating with God's people, empowering them to witness, express and defend their faith and to fulfill their mission" according to God's divine purposes.[33] Moreover, the Spirit guides them in cultivating community, even the sharing of their resources to care for one another. Acts 2:44-45 states, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." In Acts 5:1-11, Ananias and his wife Sapphira are punished for lying to the Spirit by attempting to deceive others concerning their willingness to share with the faith community. This judgment demonstrates that violating one another within the faith community is a violation of God Himself. Faithfulness to God includes faithfully relating to one another.

In this way, the Church reflects God's relationality through its participation in the gospel which includes not only our faithful external witness to nonbelievers but also our internal fidelity to one another. Paul, in his epistles to believers, uses language to communicate this principle of relationality. Specific terms like family of God and body of Christ are used to denote community.[34] Daines helps to expand our understanding that

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[33] Duvall and Hayes, *God's Relational Presence*, 207.

[34] Michreal Olajide, "The Use of Metaphor in Pauline Theology," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences,* vol. 5 iss 14, (2015), 51.

such metaphors are used in several ways to communicate principles of unity to the Church including "the idea of corporate personality of Christ and believers" the "interdependence and interrelatedness of believers," the collective accountability and responsibility believers one to another, and the "authority" of Christ as the head of the body (Church) and the "inseparability of the body" from Him.[35]

These aspects in concert reflect unity "as achieved through the cross" as well the influence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit through whom the Church when operating in is empowered to become a vibrant reflection of God.[36] The interdependence and interrelatedness of members are reflective of God ontologically. The Church reflects God organizationally through its submission to Christ. Just as Christ honors God, the Father's Headship, and authority in the Trinity, believers are to honor Christ as the Head and Authority of the Church. Again, all these aspects culminate in the inseparability of believers from Christ, that is the oneness of believers with God in Christ for which Jesus prayed. John 17: 20-21, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

The impact and effect of this unity, this relational and communal existence with God and believers, should be noted. Jesus articulates that it affects belief. The collective relationship of the Church with God and one another impacts the world's faith in Jesus' identity and mission. In other words, if the relationality of the Church is consistent with that of God Himself and the oneness for which Jesus prays, the result is the facilitation of

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[35] Brian Daines, "Paul's Use of the Analogy the Body of Christ: With Special Reference to 1Corinthians 12," *Evangelical Quarterly* (Paternoster Press, 1978), vol. 50 number 2: 72, 73, 74.

[36] Daines, *Paul's Use of the Analogy the Body of Christ*, 75.

the world's faith in Jesus as the Son of God, sent by God to redeem humanity and restore the relationship intended by God from the beginning.

Application to the Local Congregation

In his book *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, Israel Galindo offers that most congregations have similar goals. Their mission is "to be the living manifestation of the Body of Christ, to engage in religious practices (worship, prayer, ministry to others and so forth) to perpetuate the faith through educational enterprises and to be a redeeming presence for its members, and for its surrounding communities and the world."[37] Unfortunately many congregations find themselves falling short of this goal and thus failing to achieve their mission. One contributing factor to this paradigm is the proclivity to simply view congregations as organizations rather than adopting the spiritual perspective of the congregation as an organism. The result is the practice of managing churches as an almost secular institution as opposed to cultivating and nurturing spiritual relationships.[38] Samuel Chand also identifies misplaced priorities as a deterrent to alignment with the agenda of God regarding establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships to facilitate healthy congregations, noting outside of prioritizing God, the emphasis should be on people.[39]

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[37] Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Congregational Dynamics* (Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 14.

[38] Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, 20.

[39] Samuel R. Chand, *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision and Inspiration* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 4.

While institutional concerns can be important, God is concerned about people. God values relationships. We were created with the capacity for relationships, including the propensity to be impacted by others' emotions and to learn to navigate the social interchanges so that our responses become reflexive, expected, and fulfilling.[40] When we live disconnected it leaves us "unfulfilled and even unhealthy" emotionally, sometimes physically but certainly spiritually.[41] Unfortunately many believers have ascribed to the particularly American paradigm of individualism which is antithetical to the Personhood of God and to the principles of biblical Christianity.

While often overlooked, there is much to learn from the continent of Africa, particularly regarding believers' reflections on the relational personhood of God. Founded upon the principle that God is the source of our existence, "there are some valuable insights to discover to God's purpose for wholeness and salvation for individuals and communities" – the thrust of the Gospel message that as Christians, the local congregation is charged to perpetuate through facilitating relationships.[42] To reiterate the unbuntu not only helps to frame the core understanding of the personhood of God, but also the identity of believers in the context of the family of God. Forster writes:

> The answer is always stated in a relational manner. A traditional answer would be one in which the individual identifies himself in relation to … wider social grouping… For the African it is the lived experience, and reality, of being in relationship that forms his or her identity. Relationship as identity is an active engagement in the development of the concept of 'self.'[43]

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[40] Todd Hall and M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, *Relational Spirituality: A Psychological-Theological Paradigm for Troansformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 95.

[41] Shelly and York, *The Jesus Community*, 119.

[42] Forster, *African Relational Ontology*, 244.

[43] Forster, *African Relational Ontology*, 245.

This is important particularly for the local congregation, particularly in Christian formation as it shapes individuals' understanding that to identify as a disciple of Jesus Christ means that their identity is not individually formed but instead shaped in the context of community with the Triune God, the Church universally, and the local congregation. A major component of that identity as a disciple is to follow the mandates of Christ, specifically to intentionally, consistently, and collaboratively persist in the endeavor to engage in a loving relationship with God – for His glorification; with others within the body of Christ – to contribute to their edification, and with people outside the body – to facilitate their salvation.

Conclusion

Relational theology is particularly helpful in not only understanding the Triune God ontologically, but also how His existence shapes the identity of the Church universal, the local congregation, and the identity of every believer. Knowing that God is relational mandates that as God's children and disciples of Jesus Christ, believers, as we are empowered by his Holy Spirit, align our thoughts, and pattern our behaviors to reflect the loving relational nature of God. We pattern this thinking and behavior in the context of the family of God, but also in the world at large. In doing so, we glorify God by working in love to maintain the unity that God has gifted the Church by His Spirit and sharing that love with those who do not know Jesus and the pardon of their sins. This manner of being demonstrates to the world the authenticity of our relationship with Christ as well as Christ's relationship with the Father. In this way, believers participate with God for the continued edification of His Church and the salvation of humanity.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY

As the nomenclature suggests Community Psychology assumes and concerns itself with humans, who though individual in their existence, innately seek community. Most succinctly, community psychology is "the applied study of the relationship between social systems and individual wellbeing in the community context."[1] More than a static entity however, but a rather novel perspective, community psychology requires more nuance to appropriately define. Focused on social change, community psychology is an endeavor to support individual diversity by enabling society to accept those differences without rendering harm.[2] In *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Wellbeing*, the authors source an even more comprehensive definition of Community Psychology.

> Community psychology offers a framework for working with those marginalized by the social system that leads to self-aware social change with an emphasis on value based, participatory work of forging alliance. It is a way of working that is pragmatic, whilst not wedded to any particular orthodoxy of method. As community psychology is one alternative to the dominant individualistic psychology typically taught and practiced in the high-income countries. It is *community* psychology because it emphasizes a level of analysis and intervention other than the individual and their immediate interpersonal context. It is

[1] Carrie E. Hanlin, Kimberly Bess, Patricia Conway, Scotney D. Evans, "Community Psychology," Chap. 28 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, eds. Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton-Rogers (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 2.

[2] Julian Rappaport, *Community Pyschology: Values, Research, and Action* (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1977), 1.

> *community* psychology because it is nevertheless concerned with how people feel, think, experience and act together.[3]

In this way the genre prioritizes the health of the whole community rather than only mitigating the issues of a select few. Instead of identifying genetic or innate psychological processes, the research of community psychologists center on the macro levels of neighborhood, community, and society.

In attempting to define community psychology it is also necessary to highlight tenets that are primary in its focus. Community psychology is value-driven, it is distinct in its framing of issues, and it is considerate of the contextual aspects of peoples' existence.[4] Examining these components will not only improve the conceptualization of community psychology but also help to elucidate its relatedness to the spiritual thrust of our overarching endeavor.

Values

Values influence and determine the issues that garner attention and the priority that is placed on addressing them. Moreover, these values are directly proportional to the observants' intrinsic and communal principles. The predominant value for those in community psychology is that of community.[5] Community psychologists are concerned with identifying and mitigating the systemic factors that negatively affect people's health

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[3] Manuel Riemer, Stephanie M. Reich, Scotney D. Evans, Geoffrey Nelson and Isaac Prilleltensky, *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Wellbeing* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 4.

[4] Riemer, Reich, Evans, Nelson and Prilleltensky, *Community Psychology*, 5.

[5] David M. Chavis and J.R. Newbrough, "The Meaning of "Community" in Community Psychology," *Journal of Community Psychology* 14, no. 4 (1986), 335.

and wellness and implementing systems and ways of working that promote holistically healthy outcomes.[6] This can be observed through an emphasis on social justice, the appreciation of diversity, and the effort to dignify the marginalized. When these issues are met with passion in various segments of society, it is because individuals and communities find it paramount to see their values reflected in their communities as evidenced by their work.[7]

It is important to note that through the acknowledgement of values community psychology challenges the contention that conventional psychology is wholly objective. In fact, it is held that the endeavor of objectivity is itself a value.[8] It is precisely the assumption of the lack of objectivity and inequity regarding class, gender, economics, race, and other demographics that drives much of the work of community psychologists. One component of that work is the development of vision. Values drive the vision for the work of community psychologists. A key component of that vision is empowering communities to assess and meet their needs to facilitate the wellbeing of the community at-large.[9] Considering the common stressors, needs or inadequacies helps practitioners to develop specific goals and define the work necessary to foster progress toward realizing the vision for their community so their values can be demonstrated.

Framing

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[6] Hanlin, Bess, Conway, Evans, "Community Psychology," 2.

[7] Manuel Riemer et al., *Community Psychology*, 5.

[8] Hanlin, et al., “Community Psychology,” 3.

[9] Victoria C. Scott and Susan M. Wolfe, *Community Psychology: Foundations for Practice* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2015), 422.

Framing is the perspective from and through which issues and events are viewed. The ways in which individuals both in the academy and practitioners organize and interpret issues and events gives meaning, and thus shapes their responses to those circumstances. In other words, framing has significant impact on how "issues are investigated and how interventions are developed."[10] Therefore, how issues and circumstances are framed can influence whether interventions are targeted toward individuals, small groups, or entire communities. For example, should efforts be concentrated on meeting the need of the community regarding suffering to promote the health of some or should energies be focused on addressing the systemic cause of the suffering and increase the chance of fostering the health of all? Framing facilitates these kinds of decisions.

Ecology

Community psychology also emphasizes an ecological model. The metaphor of ecology is used to conceptualize the relationship between individuals and the various social systems to which they simultaneously belong.[11] The ecological perspective changes how practitioners frame issues moving from an individualized approach to a systems approach. In this way humans are viewed in a way that considers community is "dynamic, evolving, and adaptive" as individuals continue to engage others within their environments with varying degrees of intimacy.[12]

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[10] Riemer, et al., *Community Psychology*, 5.

[11] Riemer, et al., *Community Psychology*, 93.

[12] Riemer, et al., *Community Psychology*, 93.

Interaction with Project Theme

On the surface the relationship between community psychology and religion, specifically Christianity, may be debatable because unfortunately, many believers have ascribed to the particularly American paradigm of individualism. This individual focus is contrary to the Personhood of God and to the principles of Biblical Christianity. Therefore, when considering the nature of God and God's expectation of those with whom God has relationship, the correlation of community psychology and Christianity becomes more apparent. Due to this it may be to our advantage to appreciate and apply, the wisdom of community psychology insofar as it compliments and is congruent with the Word of God. To observe this correlation, it is necessary to reiterate the problem we seek to address. The vestiges of broken relationships are disrupting the unity and fellowship necessary for healthy ministry in an urban congregation of the Churches of Christ in the mid-south. It is proposed that if the congregation engages in a multi-week study on unity, with accompanying activities it will promote the spiritual relationships within the church that are necessary to facilitate healthy ministry.

In John 17:11, Jesus asserts that he and God the Father are one. He continues in verse twenty, to articulate, that this sense of communal existence is also his desire for those who are his immediate followers and those who will believe in him based on their testimony. He is quoted as saying, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21).

Though Jesus is emphatic both in his desire and demand for his followers to live in loving community, he is also aware that because of our flawed human condition, there will be offences. God's people of antiquity, the Hebrews, even though they were commanded, counseled, and cautioned by God, still erred, bickered, and experienced conflict with one another. So too Christians of New Testament scripture and today experience the same. How then does community psychology help us to address this issue?

Community psychology is an advantageous approach first because of its inherent value of community which is consistent with the priority of community within Christianity. The word community in its application to a conversation regarding psychology compels consideration of the nuances of how persons behave, identify, interact, and respond, particularly within community. There is an obvious social component. As Clauss-Ehlers notes, community psychology emerged in the United States as a collective endeavor to address the myriad limitations of conventional psychology in response to social issues.[13] Nancy Pearcey contends "the Rosetta Stone of Christian social thought is the Trinity."[14] While sociology is not the specific focus of this work, Pearcey's assertion does two things. First, it provides a basis of relatedness to community psychology. Pearcey's words also offers insight into how God is perceived in the context of community – the pattern which many Christians believe God desires for their identity development and engagement both individually and communally.

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[13] Caroline S. Clauss-Ehlers, "Promoting Change amid Systemic Oppresion, " in *The Cambridge Handbook of Community Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Contextual Perspectives,* ed. Caroline S. Clauss-Ehlers (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

[14] Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 132.

The concept of the Trinity is central to God's identity from a Christian perspective. In Western theological thought the concept of the Triune God originates largely from the Eastern Church which framed the work of God as Creator, Redeemer and Transfigurer – distinct activities that were each ascribed to a hypostasis, each corresponding to a person.[15] Augustine refined the thinking, postulating that God is "one person within whose interior life a three-fold distinction can be made."[16] Within this divine community there is intimacy, fellowship, and communion – all of which go beyond the actions themselves and are fundamental to God's very identity. Pinkham and Gruenburg also describe the nature of God as communal rather than individualistic, meaning the identity of each member of the Godhead is inextricably tied to the other members.[17] Further, McGrath views the Triune God as a "community of being, in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them."[18] Irrespective of the author, each description highlights the communal existence of God which is also observed in scripture.

Interaction with Biblical Foundation

As previously alluded, Jesus himself emphasized his and God the Father's communal relationship and his expectation that this kind of relational existence would be

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[15] John B. Cobb, "The Relativization of the Trinity," in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, eds. Joseph A Bracken and Marjorie Suchocki (London, UK: Bloomberg Academic, 1997), 4.

[16] Cobb, *The Relativization of the Trinity*, 5.

[17] Wesley M. Pinkham and Jeremiah Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity: A Remarkable Vision of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), 37.

[18] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 241.

manifested in the lives of those in relationship with God. This is no new expectation of God's people. In Psalm 133 the concept of community amongst the people of God is met with favorable language.

> Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! **2** It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes 3It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore (Ps. 133:1-3).

The text likens the unity of God's people to the anointing oil used to consecrate Aaron, the high priest. While initially seeming to refer to the benefits of social unity, verse three introduces a spiritual principle, which informs but also transcends the social. The psalmist likens unity to the blessing of dew which comes down from the heavens upon the place where God has commanded his blessing. Mays writes:

> Zion is the place of ordained blessing, the place where the people of the Lord in their unity receive everlasting life. It is this abundant life, which Israel can receive only in its unity, and only from the Presence at this place that is the *summum bonum*. The life that the Lord gives his people in their unity is the supreme family value…In services of Christian unity, the psalm is a witness that God is at work building a family that transcends all the given and instituted barriers that separate and diminish life.[19]

In essence the psalmist functions as a divinely inspired community psychologist to inform the thinking; or better, the psychological perspective and the subsequent behaviors of his people. He reinforces within them the value of community.

In the focus text used to address the problem, we observe similar values and principles. Philippians 4:2-3, reads, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow

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[19] James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 414.

workers, whose names are in the book of life." In these verses Paul admonishes two women, Euodia and Syntyche to "agree in the Lord." The specific cause for what appears to be a disruption in unity between the two is not explicitly articulated, apparently, though, there is some type of conflict between them.[20]

To resolve this conflict, several aspects of community psychology are employed. Paul, the author of Philippians, first reminds them of their guiding value, specifically of patterning their lives after Christ and their partnership with Christ, himself, and one another. He encourages women to aim for unity and harmony in life, which is possible because of their shared faith in the Lord, which is far more than just agreement in thinking or opinion. The expression "in the Lord" highlights their individual and corporate submission to Christ.[21] This appeal to share the same thinking and to have the same mind has been articulated previously in the epistle. It is a demonstration of partnership born of the Spirit and modeled by Christ (Philippians 2:6–11), where Jesus humbled himself by taking the "form of a slave" and thus becoming obedient unto death on a cross.[22]

Though Paul names the individuals involved, the conflict is viewed as more than a private matter between the two women. We observe this first through his enlistment of an individual referred to as "true companion." "Yes, and I ask you also, my true companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the

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[20] Tyler Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View of the Euodia-Syntyche Debate," *Priscilla Papers* (Autumn, 2019), 4.

[21] I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1995), 125.

[22] Gordon D. Fee, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 168–169.

gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3). While Paul does not explicitly enlist the assistance of the entire congregation, it seems to be implied. The epistle would be read publicly – including admonition to those in direct conflict and the subsequent language that reminds the congregation that each person whom he has expressly named as well as those who are co-workers in the gospel, which implies the entire congregation, have their names written in the book of life. By doing so Paul highlights not only their individual accountability to God but also their collective accountability to God and one another.

In this way, the problem is framed ecologically and not simply as an individual malady, or that of a select few. By addressing the entire community, Paul treats the issue systemically, likely in hopes that this will be a preventative measure for similar issues. This methodology builds capacity within the congregation by addressing microsystems (individuals) and the macrosystem (organization). Like the strategies identified by Scott and Wolfe, Paul employs assessments, peer-to-peer learning, the improvement of relationship quality, and the engagement of staff (leaders -bishops and deacons [1:1], Euodia, Syntyche, and "true companion") as a means of empowerment.[23] Hanlin et al remark:

> Empowerment is a complex, multi-level construct, related to individual psychological concepts such as self-efficacy, self-determination, and internal locus of control, but operating interdependently at the individual and collective (group, organization, and community) levels. Unlike purely social-cognitive concepts, empowerment is also defined by behaviors (such as critical reflection and participation in decisions that affect one's life or work) as well as knowledge, thoughts, and skills (e.g., political awareness, optimism, effective leadership qualities).[24]

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[23] Scott and Wolfe, *Community Psychology,* 195.
[24] Hanlin, et al., "Community Psychology," 11.

We clearly observe this strategy, coupled with the enablement of the Spirit, as Paul seeks to build organizational capacity "defined in terms of efforts to increase local resources for current and future problem solving or community betterment" to avoid similar issues from rising to the level of urgency as the conflict within the text.[25]

Interaction with the Historical Foundations

As has been demonstrated, conflict is an inevitable component of any organization or social system, including those which are spiritual in nature, including the Church. A cursory reading of the New Testament reveals the Church was perforated with issues from its beginnings. Less than one hundred years after the ascension of Jesus, disputes over the acceptance and practices of Gentile believers, the sufficiency of Christ for salvation and deviation from the moral norms of Christianity all plagued the early church. These issues were compounded by the introduction of false doctrine by teachers motivated by their own self-interests who began to pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-9).

These disputes continued even as the Church developed and grew. Notable men like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, William Tyndale, and others attempted in their own ways to reform the Church through various means. None of these men sought to fracture the Church but wished to address the issues they observed in a systemic way primarily addressing the Church's leadership. Unfortunately, however, theological, and personal differences resulted in the beginning of several denominations

[25] Edison J. Tricket, "Community Psychology: Individuals and Interventions in Community Context," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2009), 411.

in Europe including Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Anglicans, and others. Still, within the distinct denominations, fissures continued.

The norms of religious division also extended into the culture of the New World as people emigrated from Europe, bringing with them their preferences, interpretations of scripture, and expedients. It is this context into which the early leaders, like Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, and his son, Alexander Campbell was thrust. Their desire to witness and encourage the fellowship of believers irrespective of sectarian ideology inconsistent with scripture gave rise to what they deemed a reformation aimed at unity. They believed this unity was the prayer of Jesus as recorded in John 17:20-23:

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (Jn. 17:20-23).

Men like Stone and the Campbells were instrumental in endeavoring to unify the Church. Through their faith, their indomitable spirit and what they believed was proper interpretation of the scriptures they hoped to lead the church – imposing a community psychology theme – to have as its common value "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love." This sentiment is evidenced in the language Stone and his colleagues used as they expressed a desire to continue fellowship even as they withdrew from the jurisdiction of the Kentucky Synod.

> Our affection for you, as brethren in the Lord, is, and we hope shall ever be the same: nor do we desire to separate from your communion, or to exclude you from ours. We ever wish to forbear, in the matters of human order, or opinion, and unite our joint supplications with yours for the

> increasing effusions of that divine Spirit, which is held in the bond of peace.[26]

Although these men framed the issue of divisions as systemic, their approach of address was targeted at individuals. They believed that individuals had the right to interpret scripture free from the dictates of their structured ecclesiastical regimes and to follow their earnest convictions. They thus endeavored to effect change that would manifest Rappaport's characterization of community psychology, which is to support individual diversity by enabling society – in this case the denominations – to accept those differences without rendering harm.[27] Harm in this context would be excommunication.

Despite that the younger Campbell and Stone were able at one point to unify their efforts, eventually the Restoration Movement as it came to be known would also splinter. The Restoration Movement first known as the Stone-Campbell Movement was the fifth largest Christian body within the United States in the 1870 census. According to some estimates, in the 1850s, it was the fastest growing religious group in the nation.[28] This is due at least in part to the convergence of two dynamic movements. There split does not diminish their endeavor to achieve unity using scripture and unbeknownst to them principles that would become aspects of community psychology. Through studying their work along with their unnamed male and female co-laborers we can learn much from the spiritual and psychological strategies they used.

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[26] Barton W. Stone, John Rogers, Harrison and Jewett, and Presbytery of Springfield (1803-1804). *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone* (Cincinnati, OH: Published for the author by J.A. and U.P. James, 1847), 171.

[27] Julian Rappaport, *Community Pyschology: Values, Research, and Action* (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1977), 1.

[28] John Young, *Visions of Restoration: The History of Churches of Christ* (Florence, AL: Cypress Publications, 2019), 21.

Interaction with the Theological Foundation

Relational theology has its roots in various Christian theological perspectives, including the Wesleyan tradition. Its emphasis is the engaging nature of God especially in the context of His relationship with humanity.[29] Wesley's perspective and our effort to understand God's relationality and its congruence with community psychology again compels examination of the personhood of God. Why? It is impossible to properly conceptualize relationships which is the foundation of community without adequate consideration of the persons involved. In their book *Relational Christianity*, Pinkham and Gruenburg identify two concepts that are important to our understanding of the nature of God and the lived Christian experience. First is the relationally dynamic personhood of God which is epitomized in the Trinity.[30] Next is that this nature is revealed in the Incarnate Christ. We reiterate the contention "the Rosetta Stone of Christian social thought is the Trinity."[31] Examining God's relational existence in community, affords the opportunity for greater appreciation of the connection to community psychology within the culture of the church.

Previously, values were identified as a key component of community psychology and vision as a product of those values. The concept of community has been established as a common thread in community psychology and the foundational framework of this project, beginning with the communal existence of God expressed in the Trinity. With

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[29] Barry L. Callen, "John Wesley and Relational Theology," in *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction,* eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas J. Oord, and Karen Winslow (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 7.

[30] Pinkham and Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity*, 36.

[31] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 132.

community being an inherent value of God, it is understandable that it is also God's vision theologically. In *The Jesus Community* the authors highlight the manifestation of God's vision for the communal essence of believer's lives portrayed in Acts 2:47 where the Church "enjoyed 'the good will of all the people' because of its rich sense of community."[32] Likewise, God still envisions that a rich relational thrust will remain extant within congregations today. The Church reflects God's vision of community through its participation in the gospel which includes not only faithfully witnessing to nonbelievers, but also fidelity to one another. Paul communicates this principle in his epistles. He employs terms such as family of God and body of Christ to express the concept of community.[33] Daines explains that the metaphors are used in several ways to communicate principles of unity to the Church including "the idea of corporate personality of Christ and believers" the "interdependence and interrelatedness of believers," the collective accountability and responsibility believers one to another, the "authority" of Christ as the head of the body (Church) and the "inseparability of the body" from Him.[34] Thus, he articulates God's vision of community in which individuals and God are participants.

This should impact how congregations view themselves ecologically which is another correlation that can be observed as an ecological perspective is a characteristic of community psychology. In his book *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, Israel Galindo

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[32] Rubel Shelly and John O. York, *The Jesus Community: A Theology of Relational Faith* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2004), 59.

[33] Michreal Olajide, "The Use of Metaphor in Pauline Theology." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences,* vol 5 iss 14, (2015), 51.

[34] Brian Daines, "Paul's Use of the Analogy the Body of Christ: With Special Reference to 1 Corinthians 12," *Evangelical Quarterly* (Paternoster Press, 1978), vol. 50, number 2, 72, 73, 74.

offers that most congregations have a mission "to be the living manifestation of the Body of Christ, to engage in religious practices (worship, prayer, ministry to others and so forth) to perpetuate the faith through educational enterprises and to be a redeeming presence for its members, and for its surrounding communities and the world."[35] That is they wish to be a redeeming mechanism that facilitates the wellbeing of their respective communities. However, there is the proclivity to simply view congregations as organizations rather than adopting the spiritual perspective of the congregation as an organism. The result is the practice of managing churches as an almost secular institution as opposed to cultivating and nurturing spiritual relationships.[36] This approach is static and does not allow for dynamic interaction that facilitates the wellbeing of community for which community psychology advocates and which God intends. The quality of life of individual community members is dependent on the engagement and the participation of members in the systems of the community.[37] This is reminiscent of the dynamism of God. John Wesley was instrumental in moving thoughts of God from distant to intimate and from static to dynamic. As alluded previously Pinkham and Gruenburg also identify the relationally dynamic personhood of God.[38] When individual members of congregations lovingly engage one another, especially during episodes of conflict they reflect this component of God's relational nature and demonstrate authentic relationship with God as disciples of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "by this all people will know that

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[35] Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Congregational Dynamics* (Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 14.

[36] Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, 20.

[37] Chavis and Newbrough, *The Meaning of Community,* 338.

[38] Pinkham and Gruenberg, *Relational Christianity*, 36.

you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35) Moreover, through this reflection of God's dynamism, concern, engagement and interaction, all key components of community psychology are manifested.

Conclusion

The field of community psychology is itself an interdisciplinary endeavor. In this way it is one that can also be effectively employed to assist in facilitating the holistic wellbeing of communities of faith. While the specific impact of community on physical health is debatable, there is a powerful relationship. This is especially true when there is an apparent desire among individuals to be in the community.[39] One example is the preventative component of community psychology. Preventative measures have the potential to mitigate stressors and other problems that could be disruptive to the health and tranquility of an environment through "the provision of emotional support, the transfer of information, the development of a sense of control, and the development of greater competence."[40]

While the former statement was intended by the authors to address physical concerns, this is also applicable to individuals' and faith communities' spiritual health. Previously, Paul's approach to the conflict within the Philippian Church is an immediate example. Through leveraging his friendship with Euodia, Syntyche, the "loyal companion" and the congregation, he provides emotional support. Reminding them of the call for unity in this epistle that would be read publicly, he transfers vital information.

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[39] David M Chavis, and J.R. Newbrough. "The Meaning of "Community" in Community Psychology." *Journal of Community Psychology* 14, no. 4 (1986) 336.

[40] Chavis and Newbrough, *The Meaning of "Community" in Community Psychology*, 336.

And through his instruction to the leaders and the congregation, he builds capacity thus developing great competence.

As the Philippian text is the biblical foundation of the project, using Paul's example of the effective implementation of community psychology principles is particularly informative. It provides an interdisciplinary framework from which to begin and model as we seek to provide spiritual support, disseminate information, and build capacity to foster unity in our relationships to facilitate effective ministry.

This is necessary for the congregation, particularly to glorify God, to implement such practice in the context of the family of God, but also in the world at large. We thus reflect God by working in love to maintain the unity which God has gifted the Church by His Spirit and sharing that love with those who do not know Jesus and the pardon of their sins. This posture and practice manifest the authenticity of our relationship with Christ as well as Christ's relationship with the Father. In this way, believers participate with God for the continued edification of God's Church and salvation of humanity.

While community psychology like any discipline has its limitations, we take its positive lessons whilst relying on the enablement of the Spirit and guided by scripture to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit. Why? Because as Christians it is incumbent of us to facilitate community by being of one mind and labor in assisting others who name Christ as Lord to do the same. If we are to demonstrate our partnership in the gospel it must be articulated by our actions in the context of a community reflective of God who exists in the Divine Community – Father Son, and the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The thrust of this chapter is to reflect on information obtained through the analysis of a problem that many congregations have experienced at some point in their existence – the issue of disunity. Detailed are the final analysis of the project, a description of its process, a summary of the field experience, and reflections. Additionally, suggestions for further research are offered.

Highland Heights Church of Christ had its beginnings in the mid-1940s as the Scott Street Church of Christ. Early on, the congregants demonstrated their resilience by maintaining their existence as a congregation, despite not having a full-time preacher. After some time, meeting in a storefront on Scott Street, parishioners purchased land and built a small worship edifice on Carpenter and renamed the congregation to reflect their new location. Brother Robert Bond was named as pastor and served the church well into the 1960s. After his departure, the church was served by several short-term preachers until 1984 when Kenneth Wallace was named as pastor.

Under Pastor Wallace, the church began to flourish. He led the church in its formation, expanding its outreach, community, and denominational presence amongst sister congregations. The congregation grew such that it necessitated moving to its present location 3587 Macon Road in Memphis, Tennessee in 1992. For another eight

years, the congregation progressed and reached a membership of nearly four hundred active congregants until Pastor Wallace passed in 2000 at the tender age of forty-six.

Pastor [redacted] was named as the next leader and the church initially continued a steady path. Unfortunately, however, Pastor [redacted] was accused of moral failures which the congregation's peripheral leaders discovered. When confronted, [redacted] refused to confess and instead publicly derided the leadership board. As his contract neared its conclusion, the board decided against renewal. Attempting to protect his reputation and in consideration of his wife, they withheld the true reason for [redacted]'s nonrenewal. This proved disastrous for the congregation's continuity as Pastor [redacted] split the congregation which also left a vacuum of peripheral leadership.

The result was a congregation struggling to survive with sincere though ill-prepared leaders and members who were hurt and embittered toward one another. It is into this context that I was called as pastor in 2011. In my naivete, I assumed there would be cohesion because we were seeking God's glory and the church's health. I discovered our views of what was in the congregation's best interest were divergent. Due to inexperience, I attempted to override the agenda of those, I believed, were standing in the way of where I believe God has called me to lead the congregation. Admittedly, I mishandled some situations that exacerbated preexisting rifts amongst some of the members who supported me and those who were influenced by other leaders. Despite my mistakes as a leader, we have grown spiritually, by God's grace, as a congregation. Still, we have failed to reach our potential because the undercurrent of disunity remains extant amongst the leadership board and some members. This project was designed to facilitate progress toward unity and ministry efficacy.

Project Purpose

The project hypothesis is if the congregation engages in a multi-week study on the Holy Spirit's leadership of the Church, it will promote the unity within the church that is necessary to facilitate healthy ministry. The purpose of this project has been for identified participants and members alike, to realize that the Holy Spirit is God and one of the Holy Spirit's purposes is to guide believers to operate in unity. Additionally, we aimed to facilitate the understanding that there can be no authentic unity among the congregation until there is unity between the leaders and members with the Holy Spirit, which would prayerfully result in our spiritual development evidenced in part by the willingness to forgive any residual bitterness between members of the congregation.

The expectation was to see changes in participants' actions to the extent that participants and members were willing to set aside personal preferences. By discerning the leadership of the Holy Spirit as communicated through the leadership of the pastor and in alignment with scripture, participants would despite their personal preferences, demonstrate a willingness to participate in activities necessary to promote unity thus benefiting the general congregation's efficacy.

Project Objectives

The following objectives were established for this project:

1. To demonstrate through scripture, the Holy Spirit’s nature, and practice of unity within the Godhead.
2. To provide scriptural examples of the Holy Spirit’s influence on believers' practice of unity.

3. To demonstrate the negative impact of disunity on the milieu and ministry of the local church.
4. To enhance participants' and members' understanding of the Holy Spirit's initiative of unity, facilitating increased submission and improved practice regarding said unity.

Methodology

The most appropriate method to conduct this study was to use qualitative research. We determined that it would be the most effective means to collect and interpret the data to provide intelligent feedback. The goal was to construct a group of participants who would be honest and forthcoming regarding their perceptions of unity within the congregation and their understanding of the influence of the Holy Spirit or lack thereof on congregational unity. We hoped that a concerted effort and focus on the Holy Spirit's leadership would facilitate a deeper understanding and result in improved submission to the Spirit. Moreover, it was our prayer that the response would prove to energize the congregation's spiritual growth and desire to engage in ministry with unity.

Selected congregants were engaged in a series of targeted biblical sermons, studies, and discussions aimed at improved understanding of the Holy Spirit's role and expectation of believers to both practice and preserve unity within the Church. Further, our motivation was this improved understanding would facilitate project participants' and members' willingness to abate languishing resentment evidenced by improved relationships and cooperation in worship and ministry opportunities. The hypothesis of the focus group was measured by comparative methods using pre- and post-surveys, prior

to beginning and after concluding the seven-week preaching/teaching series. Interviews were also conducted with participants to gain additional insight. Each week's scriptural text was introduced on Sundays via a preached sermon. We followed up with a biblical discussion on Wednesdays to allow opportunities for questions and dialogue. Participants were also asked to keep a journal and were given fifteen minutes at the conclusion of each Wednesday session to make journal entries.

The post-surveys were used to observe the participants' thoughts in comparison to the pre-survey. The goal was to determine if there were changes in their perspective of the Holy Spirit's role in unity as well as their perception of unity regarding the milieu of the congregation.

Implementation

Participants

Fifteen individuals were invited to participate in the study however, only thirteen consented to participate. We met initially to discuss the general purpose and goals of the study and to explain its relevance to the long-term vitality of the congregation and our spiritual health individually. The participants were encouraged to be honest with their responses as they would remain confidential. As such there would be no negative consequences should their responses be unflattering.

The demographic make-up of the volunteers included eight women and five men. The entire group was African American which represents the overwhelming majority of

the congregation. The ages of the participants range from thirty-four to seventy-seven. This age range is also representative of our congregation.

A pre-survey and interview were conducted with the participants before the first sermon. The pre-survey was to gauge the participants' perceptions of congregational unity, how it impacted their participation in ministry, how the perception of unity influenced their engagement outside of scheduled gatherings, and what factors might engender unity amongst the congregation. The pre-interview was more biblically focused as the questions were aimed at determining participants' understanding of unity from a biblical perspective. Further, it was desired to gauge their understanding of the correlation between unity and ministry effectiveness, the Holy Spirit's role in unity regarding leadership – both ordained and lay leaders, and finally the responsibility of individual members, if any, to cultivate unity within the congregation.

A post-survey and interview were administered similarly after the final Bible Study. Analysis of the information through comparison and contrasting responses provided insight into the project's effectiveness. Additionally, the participants also engaged in focused group discussions as part of our follow-up Bible Study sessions and were allowed to journal during the final ten to fifteen minutes of the group discussions to express their thoughts, gleanings or lingering questions.

Preaching/Teaching Sessions Overview

The thematic thrust of the series of sermonic and Bible study presentations was unity as initiated by the Holy Spirit. The series was entitled "Better Together" to articulate the theme of unity among believers and together with God – Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. At the beginning of each study, the group, along with all present, were reminded of the importance of unity as a reflection of and in response to God.

The first sermon and Bible study was entitled, “Let’s Stay Together,” based on Philippians 4:2-3. The theme of this message was that disunity is antithetical to the person, plans, and purpose of God because instead of fusing the community of faith and expanding the gospel, disunity fractures the church and encumbers the gospel. In the text, Paul addresses Euodia and Syntyche, two women who were prominent and influential in the Philippian Church. A dispute between these leading women had begun to spill over and impact the unity of the congregation at large.

By addressing the epistle not only to Euodia and Syntyche but to the entire congregation, Paul demonstrates that it is not just a private matter, which establishes the principle that our relationships in Christ may be personal, but they are not private. The relationships we have in Christ are partnerships, which is undergirded by Paul’s use of the word *koinonia* in 1:5, which is translated as partnership in the English Standard Version. Paul uses the same word in 2:1 emphasizing the partnership of the Spirit. This partnership with the Spirit was modeled by Christ during His sojourn on Earth and is thus leveraged by Paul as an example for believers to emulate. Paul makes a plea and devises a plan for unity that includes “true companion” and the church which again has implications on how these believers represent the gospel – that is how they do ministry.

We surmised that as followers of Christ, believers are charged to follow Jesus’ example that as He partnered with God, the Father, the Holy Spirit, and those persons who labored with Him. We must also partner with one another along with Christ as we

are empowered by the Spirit to reflect our relationships with Christ as we seek to continue His ministry.

The next installment in the series was entitled, “We Belong Together.” The foundational passage for the study was Psalm 133. The purpose of this study was to elucidate that unity amongst the people of God is indicative of the anointing presence of the Holy Spirit. In Psalm 133, the anointing oil that had been consecrated by God to only be used according to God’s designation was used to affirm Aaron as the high priest of Israel. Aaron, however, occupied the earthly office of high priest as a temporal figure of Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest.

Just as the head of Aaron was anointed with the oil, the same anointing oil flows onto his body. As Christ, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, articulates the presence of the Holy Spirit anointing Jesus to empower His ministry (Lk. 4:18), believers like Christ (Lk. 4:1) are filled and indwelled by the Holy Spirit. (Eph.5:18; 2 Cor. 1:22-23). Unity among believers, according to the Psalm, is likened to the anointing oil which is representative of the Spirit with whom believers are anointed. As such, believers are encouraged to embody the ethic and endeavor to practice unity as a demonstration of faith in Christ and submission to the Holy Spirit.

The study for Week Three was taken from John 17, a passage that John uses to chronicle Jesus’s prayer to the Father as part of His farewell discourse. In this prayer, we identified three concepts that, though not overt, still speak to the role of the Holy Spirit in the unity of believers: Jesus emphasizes his eternal existence, he addresses his earthly experience, and finally, Jesus prays for the integrated identity of believers together with himself and the Father.

Jesus informs those listening in the immediate context and subsequent readers of his eternal nature when he requests the Father to restore the glory he had with him, in the beginning. To be sure the Holy Spirit is never mentioned explicitly in this text. However, in terms of Jesus's eternal existence with the Father, we understand from Genesis chapter one that the Spirit was also eternally present as the Genesis 1:2 text describes him hovering over the face of the deep. Just as the Father and Son are eternal, likewise, is the Spirit. This co-eternal nature of the Spirit with the Father and the Son informs our understanding of how the Spirit shares in and empowers Jesus's earthly experiences.

To consider the earthly experience of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's role, it is necessary to extend our scriptural view peripherally within John's gospel. John 3:35-36 and John 10:10, collectively capture Jesus declaring his reason for coming to earth – to afford those who would express faith in Him, eternal, and abundant life. In our focal text of John 17:3, Jesus implies eternal life is not merely immortality, rather it includes an intimate revelation of God that Jesus has been given complete authority to manifest. In other words, as he makes clear in verse three, eternal life is knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ whom the Father sent. To know Jesus intimately, however, is to know that his life and ministry were sealed and sustained by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The earthly conception of Jesus within the womb of his mother, Mary, was administered by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:35). The Holy Spirit was the anointing agent that sealed the ministry of Jesus (Lk. 4:18-20). His ministry was empowered and sustained by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:38). Clearly, the Holy Spirit plays a prominent role in the life of Jesus. As such, we can understand how Jesus would desire the same for those who follow him.

Jesus has eternally existed in community with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The prayer Jesus articulates is for the believing community, according to John 17:9; 20-23. In the prayer, Jesus expresses the desire for his community of believers to have an integrated existence indicative of the unity he explicitly communicates that he shares with the Father. Again, though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned directly, students of scripture know the Holy Spirit is included in the community of the Godhead (1 Jn. 5:7 NKJV). Moreover, as discussed in subsequent lessons, the Holy Spirit will guide believers in realizing God's purpose for the unity of God's people with one another and with him.

Our focus for Week Four was Ephesians 4:1-6, a lesson entitled "Walk This Way." The emphasis of this pericope is the believers' responsibility to walk, meaning to live in ways that facilitate the maintenance of Christian unity as established by the Holy Spirit. We highlighted several things from the text to help those who listened to understand and prayerfully apply this principle.

Paul begins with the allegory of walking, which symbolizes individuals' lifestyles. He suggests believers' collective endeavors should be to live worthy of, or commensurate with their calling. This is picturesque language. The imagery is that of a scale. On one side is the conduct of believers; on the other is the vocation to which God has called believers. The scale should be balanced, indicating that our conduct is worthy of our calling, Paul infers.

To readers' understanding of the type of conduct that God expects to be characteristic of believers endeavoring to align with the Holy Spirit's intent, Paul articulates actions, attributes, and the overarching attitude that should be extant. A believer's walk, Paul writes, should be saturated with humility, gentleness, and patience.

Moreover, it should be characterized by unconditional love. These qualities are counter-cultural, especially to the social norms of Ephesus, but they follow the pattern of Christ as Paul will indicate in 5:2.

Additionally, believers are encouraged that such attributes and attitudes will foster the desire to demonstrate forbearance toward one another to maintain unity which the Holy Spirit established to sustain peace amongst believers, reflecting the peace of God. To further bolster the ethic of unity that the Spirit administers, Paul identifies seven points of unity within the Church, including the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In so doing, Paul crystallizes the importance of unity amongst believers and the Holy Spirit's role as the Father's proxy to administer unity within the Church. One is thus led to interpret a walk, that is, conduct counterproductive to unity as misaligned with the Holy Spirit and influenced by spirits not belonging to God, which is antithetical to Christian discipleship.

"The Danger of Division," based on 1 Corinthians 1:10ff; 3:1ff, was the emphasis of Week Five. During Jesus' earthly ministry, he indirectly warned of the danger of division when he was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Jesus' response to his accusers was that a house or kingdom divided against itself is incapable of standing (Matt. 12:25). This is the fate that Paul, empowered by the Spirit, combats.

In 1 Corinthians chapter one, he addresses believers who have developed contentions around their preferences regarding preachers. Some favor Peter, others Apollos, and still others Paul. Instead of maintaining the preeminence of Christ, they had allowed themselves to become prideful and boastful about their personal preferences which began to create divisions. The apostle counters by noting that Christ is not divided,

indicating that such behaviors are antithetical to Christ and an affront to the ethic of unity the Spirit has established for the Church.

In chapter 3:1, Paul notes that disunity is problematic because it indicates spiritual immaturity. Rather than submitting to the Holy Spirit, some individuals in the Corinthian Church were yielding to their flesh. Paul refers to these believers, pejoratively, calling them fleshly and infants. What he means is some of the Corinthians displayed a lack of discipline where they either had not yet learned or sadly, failed to practice submitting to the Spirit of God. This is noteworthy because the Spirit helps us to bring our thinking, behaviors, and desires into alignment with Christ.

Division amongst believers also disrupts our spiritual development by limiting our diets. Paul infers he intended to write to the Corinthians about more weighty matters; however, due to their immaturity it was necessary to feed them milk. Milk is the food of babes, infants; those who are physically immature which Paul uses as an allegory for the Corinthians' spiritual immaturity. He notes they are not ready to receive the “solid food,” – the more advanced principles of the word who desires to teach them.

Returning to 1:13-17, we note finally that disunity diminishes believers’ witness to the power of the cross. Our role as disciples is to be living examples of the power of the cross, to be credible witnesses to the transformative power of God. Prioritizing our connections, and congregations over the cross, is problematic. It is dangerous and damaging to believers’ credibility as witnesses because that disunity contradicts the identity and character of Christ, whom believers profess to follow and emulate by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our study in Week Six centered around 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. We entitled the study “An Anointed Amalgamation.” Drawing from previous lessons and cultural vernacular we began our lesson with an exploration of the word anointed and how it is used to describe individuals’ spiritual gifts or in the absence of discernment someone’s talent. However, the Holy Spirit has gifted every person in the body of Christ in some capacity and based on biblical principles the Holy Spirit is the Anointing of true believers.

According to verses one through eleven, the Holy Spirit determines, disburses, and designates every gift to every member within the body of Christ. These gifts are given to individuals; however, the gifts are not for individuals in isolation. Instead, the gifts are to benefit each body member. Many gifts are given to many members but all by the same Holy Spirit. In consideration of verses one through eleven, Paul then asserts the indivisibility of the body.

Irrespective of our demographics, and cultural and ethnic identities, believers are one in Christ, we are divinely connected. Paul employs the allegory of the body where irrespective of how body parts are identified individually, they each belong to the body irrefutably. According to Paul’s argument, this should caution believers against indifference regarding members. Verse fourteen suggests that no one member is any more or less a part of the body than others. Rather each member is integral to the body to provide for the body’s benefit whatever gift the Spirit has designated and disbursed to that member.

Each member of the body must therefore be treated as indispensable. Granted, there are members of the body who may be more visible, and more prominent. Still, on

those parts, we bestow more honor and greater care. In this way, each member is reminded of their importance to God and the body despite their visibility, which facilitates unity. This ethic is consistent with the Holy Spirit who defers to God the Father and Son but is no less God.

The final lesson in the series was taken from John 13:34-35, entitled "A Demonstration in Discipleship." In this lesson, we explored some of Jesus' final actions in the fellowship of his disciples. Few can argue that one of the hallmark attributes of Jesus's ministry was that it was marked by service. As previously discussed, ministry was also sealed and sustained by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As such, we can reason that everything Jesus did was to further the mission of God, of which the unity of believers is a significant component.

In this pericope, we discover Jesus assuming the role of a servant. He rises from supper, a place of comfort, where he is no doubt being served, to render service. In this, Jesus gives believers an example of service. When we consider the love, humility, and as we see later, the gentleness and patience with which Jesus engages his disciples, we can also discern the Spirit's presence and power. Each of these attributes displayed by Jesus is fruit born of the Spirit. He teaches us that irrespective of our position, we can render service to others, personally! In this way, as we learned in the previous lesson, we lift those who may otherwise believe that God does not value them, thus contributing to the overall unity of believers.

Jesus's actions also provide a model of enduring betrayal. He was fully aware of Judas betraying him to the religious leaders. Still, Jesus washed his feet. He knew Peter would deny him and the others would desert him, yet Jesus washed their feet. Jesus loved

his disciples despite their faults. He was willing to forbear their weaknesses and the wounds they would inflict upon Him because he loved them. Again, we see the manifestation of commands given elsewhere in scripture that can be fulfilled only with the Spirit's empowerment, for example, Ephesians 4:1-4.

Finally, Jesus articulates his expectation for his disciples to implement the practices Jesus has been demonstrating to them, specifically the love shown in this text. Previously, the disciples' love was conditional, perhaps based on their country of origin, or the sense of community they felt toward one another. However, Jesus reorients the basis of their love. Now their love is based on Christ. "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus says (Jn. 13:34). But how has Jesus loved them? Unconditionally, by the power of the Spirit. Likewise, as believers we must strive, empowered by the Spirit, to meet the Lord's expectation to serve.

Service Opportunities Overview

As part of the study, we included two service opportunities. The objective was to determine if the lessons being studied would impact participation in the ministry, specifically with the study's subjects. The lessons focused on the Holy Spirit's role in guiding the church regarding unity to increase understanding and submission to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, our prayer was to improve how the church works together.

Our first opportunity involved serving women at a transitional shelter. The facility houses up to forty women who need shelter, some of whom also need employment. Many of the women are recovering from substance abuse ranging from alcohol to heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamines. The demographic is also diverse. Women of several

ethnicities, Black, White, and Hispanic are at the facility. While the only age restriction is residents must be above eighteen years old, the women we served were between thirty and sixty.

We began engaging the women by thanking them for receiving us and introducing ourselves. We explained we were present to remind them of God's love and awareness and to encourage them to persevere. Our time included prayer – corporate and individual prayer with members who prayed for the resident's specific needs; a home-cooked meal provided by church members including some study participants; and engaging conversations. We concluded our time by allowing the residents and church members to express themselves. Most of the testimonies involved giving thanks to God for the time we shared.

Our second ministry opportunity took place at a halfway house for men. The residential facility serves ten men. The men are part of a court-ordered program that is an alternative to incarceration. They have each committed non-violent crimes, which mostly involved attempting to satisfy substance addictions. Some of the men have jobs to which they have the privilege to report daily. However, they are required to be back at the facility before 10:00 p.m. each night.

When we arrived at the facility only six men were present. They helped us retrieve the food and other items from our vehicle. This gave us the opportunity for small talk before formal introductions. The brief interaction also seemed to help eliminate social barriers that may have impeded connecting with the residents. We continued with small talk while setting up the food, drinks, and utensils.

We began similarly to our time with the women at the transitional shelter. I introduced myself and articulated that our presence was to provide a tangible witness of God's love and concern for them and to encourage them to continue their program. They introduced themselves, adding to their introduction gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the program and some things they had learned since arriving. What was significant is that they each seemed to realize that they were blessed by God for the opportunity. I believe this had a profound effect on the men from our congregation who participated.

As we ate our meal, I could hear conversations between the residents and our participating men. Both parties were being transparent. I saw individuals praying together and thoroughly engaged with one another.

The men at the home ranged from twenty-two to someone in his mid-fifties. Of our participants, I was the youngest at forty-eight. This seemed to add credibility to our witness because each resident found someone who was their senior as if they were seeking an elder's wise counsel. We ended our time with corporate prayer for each person including the staff. One resident commented that he believed our time reflected heaven, because of the sheer joy he experienced during our presence.

Summary of Learning

One of the major findings regarding the survey questions was participants' perception of ideal congregational unity. Their responses consisted of recurring themes of authentic worship, tangible support, and committed cooperation. The participants believed that unity would be visible in terms of how individuals' worship together as well

as their commitment regarding collaboration and participation in ministry initiatives. Nine of the thirteen participants responded in this manner, representing roughly 70% of the participants. During the post-survey, the number increased to eleven participants, representing 85%. This was encouraging as it represented the church maintained an ethic, at least ideologically, of unity amongst congregants. One other response perceived unity as congregants' harmonious focus on evangelism. Considering evangelism should be a major ministry thrust in any congregation if this response were interpreted as cooperation concerning ministry, it would shift the percentages to 76% and 92% respectively.

Again, this data demonstrated that the participants had an ideological framework for the concept of unity. Further, they were clear on some tangible behaviors that could be evidence of unity. Therefore, it was necessary to offer these lessons to provide a biblical perspective concerning unity. First, it was paramount to facilitate our understanding that unity is not a human concept regarding its origin. However, as Christians, we do share the responsibility with other believers to actively participate in the manifestation of biblical unity as a demonstration of our commitment to Christ and submission to the Holy Spirit.

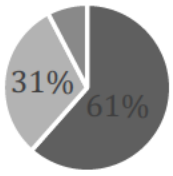
This responsibility to manifest biblical unity was the focus of the journal entry for Week One. Specifically, participants were asked how they could impact unity and ministry effectiveness. One of the key themes extant in many entries was the concept of partnership. In Philippians 1:5 and 2:1, the ESV renders *koinonia* as "partnership." It was a concept we emphasized during the sermonic presentation and the focused group discussion – the example of the partnership of Paul and the believers in Philippi with Christ and the Holy Spirit which informs our congregational partnership with one another

and Christ, being influenced by the Holy Spirit to continue the ministry of Jesus by working cohesively to spread the gospel message.

Another significant finding pertained to participants' responses to Survey Question Four. This item addressed the correlation between the participants' perceived congregational unity and their participation in outreach ministry opportunities. Eight of the thirteen participants responded that their perception of unity positively impacted their involvement in the congregation's current outreach efforts. This represented 62% of the sample population (Table 1). They expressed that unity provided a refreshing element that facilitated their excitement and motivated them to be active participants. The post-survey was relatively similar with only one other respondent expressing like sentiments, which increased the percentage of favorable responses to 69% (Table 2).

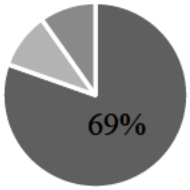
I cannot be certain, but the impact may have initially been more social than spiritual. This assessment is based on the participants' responses to Interview Question Three. While most participants expressed there was a relationship between congregational unity and ministry effectiveness, the thrust of the relationship they described concerned spreading the burden. The adage "many hands make light work" seemed to be the underlying sentiment of their responses. Only one participant referenced the biblical mandate of unity and its relationship to the Holy Spirit's influence.

Table 1
Impact of Perceived Unity on Ministry Particpation



Positive Negative None

Table 2
Impact of Perceived Unity on Ministry Participation



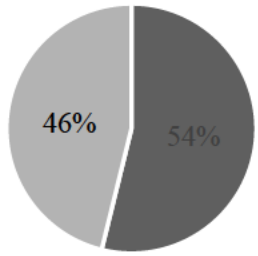
Positive Negative None

Psalm 133, our biblical text for Week Two was significant in addressing this deficit of understanding. Applying the concept of unity to the anointing oil on the head and body of the earthly high priest Aaron, which was symbolic of the Holy Spirit as the anointing agent of the eternal high priest Jesus, which included his body, the Church was informative. It allowed the participants to learn the relevance of unity in the church, specifically as an indication of the Holy Spirit's presence and influence.

I was encouraged to see the participants' understanding grow which was evidenced in their responses to Interview Question Four. Initially, their replies to the

correlation between unity and the Holy Spirit, except for the aforementioned participant, were generic. Across the board, they responded, "He wants us to show unity." "We should be unified in the Holy Spirit," and other similar responses. However, on the post-project administration of the interview, seven of the thirteen participants clearly articulated how unity in alignment with God's word is demonstrative evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence and influence. While this represents only 54% of the sample population, it is a significant increase (Table 3).

Table 3
Correlation Between Unity and Holy Spirit



One area that presents difficulty in interpreting its ramifications is Survey Question Seven. The question aimed at identifying factors that impact participants' willingness to share personal struggles with other congregants. In scripture, we are admonished to pray for each other and to comfort one another. These commands presuppose transparency between believers, which signifies a sense of unity. Six of the thirteen respondents indicated that they were at best reluctant and worse refused to share personal struggles with other congregants. While I cannot be sure this reluctance includes

sharing with other Christians outside our congregation, it caused concern. Even more alarming was in the post-survey the number remained unchanged.

I find difficulty in interpreting the ramifications because it does not appear to impact the willingness of participants to work cohesively in ministry. Similarly, it does not seem to diminish the responsiveness of members to known difficulties such as death, hospitalizations, divorce, and other public adversity. I can infer their reservations are related to trust, which can improve unity when it exists. However, does the absence of trust regarding sharing sensitive issues inhibit unity, or does it imply maturity in discernment?

Interview Question Five, in my assessment, helps to address the concern regarding developing relationships that expand trust. The question explores what, if any, responsibilities members have in cultivating congregational unity. The preliminary responses to the questions were very generic. Some of the comments were as follows:

1. "We should show love to one another."
2. "Members should work together to show we are all on one accord."
3. "I have a responsibility to show concern for my brothers and sisters in Christ and to be there for them to help them see we are truly a family."

The post-project administration revealed growth in understanding. Some responses were much more nuanced with specific references to the Holy Spirit. These responses demonstrated that participants were grasping the role of the Spirit, and the responsibilities of believers to submit to the Spirit's leadership, specifically regarding fostering unity amongst believers. Some of the post-project responses were as follows:

1. “We have to work to keep the unity of the Spirit by staying humble and learning to forgive each other so we can keep peace and unity.”
2. “We got to love each other like Jesus loved us but we need the Holy Spirit to do that because it’s too hard to love like that on our own.”
3. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit each member must use their gift to help the whole body. When each member uses their gift to help someone else, it shows we are there for each other and that brings unity.”

Though these nuanced responses were nominal, they were evidence of an increased awareness and dependence upon the Holy Spirit’s leadership and power for the unity of our congregation and a possible path toward expanding trust between members, potentially further facilitating unity.

Additionally, participants provided anecdotal evidence of the positive impact of the study. This data though not systematically recorded was valuable in gauging the participants’ sentiments and the efficacy of the study. It provided insight that might otherwise have been unattainable, which was a positive reflection of participants’ growing comfort with one another.

In informal conversations, they expressed appreciation for the experience and what they were learning about the Holy Spirit’s leadership and expectation regarding the unity of believers. Others expressed their efforts to behave in ways that demonstrate a newfound desire to strengthen relationships with members. These efforts varied in their degree of intensity. The common impetus, however, was a desire to reflect their submission to the Holy Spirit’s leadership.

Additionally, some participants initiated a ministry effort to serve the local homeless and transient population. Initially, they pooled their resources to purchase and prepare food to serve meals to their targeted population. This was their effort to embody the "Better Together" theme which encapsulated our intent to foster the unity that is indicative of the Holy Spirit's leadership. This effort grew to include more of the participants and the congregation-at-large. Individuals who had in years past, been at odds were now working collaboratively. Others, who previously did not participate in any ministries were excited to lend their gifts. They gave both finances and time to help make this newly formed ministry successful. Moreover, it became so conducive to fostering unity that the leadership board committed to funding the effort from church coffers.

Additionally, a group of brothers began meeting before Bible Study to help a brother who desired to participate more in the worship. They helped him to grow more comfortable with public reading and prayer to overcome the anxiety he felt. This improved each of their attendance in Bible Study as well as their wives' attendance. Moreover, it seemed to strengthen the bond between the brothers and increase the respect of other members toward the brother receiving the help as his participation in public worship increased.

Conclusion

A cursory consideration of the data did not reflect a drastic change. However, careful observation revealed a discernable difference, in the participants' understanding of the Holy Spirit's leadership when comparing the pre- and post-survey and pre- and post-interview responses. The improved understanding seemed to affect a positive shift,

even if minimally expressed, in the participants' desire to be accountable to the Holy Spirit as reflected by improved efforts to facilitate unity. These efforts were more apparent in their behaviors as they demonstrated an increased consideration of others, and improved communication, ministry participation, and attendance.

One can only expect incremental change to take place, within such a limited timeframe. However, when considering the empirical data, in concert with the anecdotal data, and the implications of developing a new ministry, it is my conclusion, that the hypothesis was affirmed. Only a new appreciation of and accountability to the Holy Spirit's leadership, and a willingness to reflect the unity He desires could produce these effects.

APPENDIX A

SERMONS

Better Together: Submitting to the Holy Spirit's Leadership to Develop and Demonstrate Unity in the Life of the Church, A Biblical Preaching and Teaching Series

Sermon One

Let's Stay Together

Philippians 4:2-3

I would venture to say without fear of contradiction that any serious fan of soul music is familiar with Al Green's timeless classic Let's Stay Together. Released in 1972, the song is about unconditional love in which the suitor professes his desire to stay together with the object of his affection irrespective of the circumstances. "Let's stay together," he says, "because I'm gonna love you whether times are good or bad, happy, or sad, so we ought to just stay together."

Though not in a romantic sense but on a higher spiritual and eternal level, the Apostle Paul is encouraging the saints in our text that they too ought to stay together. He's admonishing them to preserve the partnership between Christ, Paul, and themselves that God has established to further the gospel. Church, I want you to know this has current implications as well. Because, while we may recognize that we are commanded to come together regularly, we must also understand that it's not just to satisfy our individual conscience. Coming together is not for our weekly fix of religious escapism. Rather God has so designed that the Christian community comes together and stays together, not to create unity but to reflect God-established; God-honoring unity through our words and walk with so much credibility that God's message – the gospel of Jesus

Christ – continues to be perpetuated through the collective, unified witness of God's people. Yes, Friends, the message is "Let's to Stay Together!"

The book of Philippians is one that centers around togetherness - which is a key element in the life of any community of believers. This emphasis is consistent with the teachings of Christ, who throughout his ministry encouraged his followers to prioritize godly, loving relationships. John the Apostle quotes Jesus in John 13:34–35. He writes: *"34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.[1]"*

The inference is that the relationships – the togetherness of the disciples, if characterized by love, will be authenticating evidence of a relationship between each of the disciples and Jesus himself. Jesus wants those to whom He will entrust the continuation of His ministry to understand the implications of their relationships with one another.

In our text, Paul is encouraging two women – Euodia and Syntyche regarding their relationship – *to agree in the Lord* are two women the specific role of Euodia and Syntyche in the congregation is unclear. Some have equated them alternately with the *episkopoi* – bishops and *diakonoi* – deacons of Philippians 1:1.[2] Others disagree. Irrespective of their precise office, however, it is apparent that these women held some prominence and thus influence in the congregation. We see this in the way they are described in verse three.

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations will be from the English Standard Version.

[2] Tyler Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View of the Euodia-Syntyche Debate," *Priscilla Papers* (Autumn 2019):, 4.

[3] Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Here Paul includes Euodia and Syntyche as *synergon* – coworkers (NRSV), articulating they each have *synathleo moi meta* – [struggled beside (NRSV), labored side by side (ESV)] with him. Paul uses these descriptions throughout his epistles to refer to individuals like Apollos (1 Cor. 3:9); people like Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-4) – people who engage with him in both local and itinerant ministry.[3] Such is the case for Euodia and Syntyche. But though these co-workers, these partners in the gospel have worked together diligently in the past, there is now an obvious disruption in their unity. Somehow there is a breach in the relationship between these two influential women in the Philippian Church. It's problematic, not only because it hinders fellowship between them individually, but this feud, this disruption in unity, this failure to stay together, also has negative implications for the entire believing community.[4] This is a sad commentary because the influence with which God has graced these women is no longer being used to help fuse the church together and expand the gospel but instead its being used to fracture the church thus encumbering the gospel. Can I ask you a question? How are you using your influence? Are you using your influence to promote unity – to lend credibility to the collective witness of the church? Or is your influence being used to divide the church – thus diminishing the effectiveness of our partnership in the gospel? Are you using your

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[3] Robert Hull, Jr., "Constructing Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:2-3 and the Informed Imagination," *Priscilla Papers* (Spring 2016): 6.

[4] Davorin Peterlin, *Paul's Letters to Philippians in Light of Disunity in the Church* (Leiden, UK: Brill, 1995), 24.

influence well when you're gossiping about your brother's problem instead of working with him to find a solution? Is it a godly use of your influence to draw attention to your sister's fault while justifying your own frailty? To be sure, we all have influence; but the way in which we use that influence is not always as certain. If we're honest, sometimes we don't us our influence in God-honoring ways which creates problems with staying together. Listen friends, God intends that we each use whatever influence we have, to perpetuate the unity of the Church and to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its to this end that Paul makes his case.

Plea for Unity

We observe this as Paul pleads Euodia and Syntyche to stay together. Watch the text.[2] ***I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*** Paul uses *parakaleo* – a word that means to call to one's side, thus, to call to aid.[5] He says, I need your help. On the basis of statistics alone, *parakaleo* and its derivatives are among the most important terms for speaking and exerting influence in the NT. Paul employs the word when addressing both Euodia and Syntyche. By doing so, he is speaking to each directly, showing that he is addressing them separately and refusing to take sides. He was concerned not with the question of who was in the right, but rather with the need for reconciliation and unity.[6] Moreover, his tone does not come across as commanding, but instead it communicates a respectful invitation to voluntarily comply with his request. In

[5] Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1908), 97.

[6] Grant R. Osborne, *Philippians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 163.

this way, Paul invokes in both Euodia and Syntyche, their sense of familiarity with him, leveraging their friendship to convey his message which strengthens the influence of the exhortation to help.[7] But how can they help? They can help by agreeing, they can help by staying together.

Again Church, Paul exhorts these women ***to agree.*** The NRSV renders *auto fronein* – be of the same mind. It is an appeal to think the same thing, to have the same attitude, to have the same opinion, and be intent on the same goal.[8] In this case, the goal should be facilitating the partnership in the gospel, to which Paul alludes throughout the epistle. The reiteration of this admonition draws attention to the role Euodia and Syntyche play in the matter. Can I tell you something Church? We all have a role to play in spreading the gospel of Christ! Jesus gives the Great Commission, not just to the Preacher, Elders, and the deacons but to every disciple. He gives it to the ushers, the choir members, and those of us in the pews. We all have a responsibility to partner in the promotion of the gospel. The Philippians would be reminded of this admonition and thus understand the emphatic nature of Paul's appeal to function in a way that demonstrates the *koinonia* -partnership (ESV) to which he's already alluded in 1:5. **5 *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.***

In the immediate context of Philippians 4:2-3, the partnership is expressed by the phrase ***in the Lord.*** Paul implies that Euodia and Syntyche can achieve the singleness of mind he calls them to, only in the Lord. He encourages the women to aim for a unity and

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[7] Tyler Allred, "Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View of the Euodia-Syntyche Debate," *Priscilla Papers* (Autumn 2019): 4.

[8] G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 283.

harmony in life that is possible because of their shared faith in the Lord, which is far more than just agreement in thinking or opinion. The expression *"in the Lord"* refers to their individual and corporate submission the Lord.[9] This appeal, to share the same thinking and to have the same mind, has been articulated previously in the epistle. To reiterate, it is a demonstration of partnership born of the Spirit but modeled by the sacrificial example Christ (2:6–11), where Jesus humbled himself by taking the "form of a slave" and thus becoming obedient unto death on a cross.[10] In this way Jesus demonstrates the necessity of putting self aside to accomplish God's will. In their partnership with God through Christ, Euodia and Syntyche were being called upon to do the same. Church sometimes for the sake of unity, we must make sacrifices that though painful are productive. It may not always feel good but it always brings God glory! How? Paul also uses the word that conveys this partnership in 2:1, where the ESV renders it participation. ***So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, <u>any participation in the Spirit</u>, any affection and sympathy, [2]complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*** **(Php. 2:1-2).** In effect, he articulates that the functions of this partnership – agreeing, being one mind, and contributing to this partnership is achieved not only through sacrificial human effort but moreover through the sanctifying Heavenly enablement of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Church, agreeing, unity is more than an indication of a communal human

[9] I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1995), 125.

[10] Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 168–169.

enterprise. Rather, it's evidence of the Presence of Holy Spirit Himself who is partnering with us in this divine endeavor we call church.

This is not a new principle, but one which is observed and articulated even in the Old Testament Scriptures. In Psalm 133 we read:

> ***"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore"*** **(Ps. 133:1-3).**

The Psalmist uses simile to liken the unity of believers to the anointing oil used to consecrate Aaron, the high priest. While initially seeming to refer to the benefits of social unity, verse three introduces a theological component that articulates a spiritual principle which informs, but also transcends the social. The Psalmist also likens unity to the blessing of dew which comes down from the heavens upon the place where God has commanded his blessing.

Zion is the place of ordained blessing, the place where the people of the Lord in their unity receive everlasting life. It is this abundant life, which Israel can receive only in its unity, and only from the Presence of God at this place. The life that the Lord gives his people in their unity then is the supreme family value… In services of Christian unity, the psalm is a witness that God is at work in the Church, not a physical place but a spiritual location in and through which God is building a family that transcends all the given and instituted barriers that separate and diminish life.[11] In other words, like God Himself exists in the inseparable community of the Godhead, He has always purposed for His people – Israel of old and spiritual Israel. the Church to be inseparable. At times that

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[11] James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, *Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 414.

requires sacrifice, and it requires staying together. Therefore, Paul makes his plea and institutes a plan. We've seen the plea but watch the plan.

The Plan

Though Euodia and Syntyche each have great relationships with Paul, and certainly he has influence in both their lives, he does not leave them alone to comply with his plea. As my young saints would say he applies some pressure. Paul enlists some help. ***[3]Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.***

Friends, I want you to note first the fact there is a plan. Paul understands that maintaining unity requires work. It requires support. It requires facilitation. Therefore, he first solicits the help of someone referred to as "*loyal companion."* It is impossible to determine precisely whom Paul is identifying as his *loyal companion.* What is clear, however, is the linguistic connection among four words used in this verse, *syzygos, syllambano, synathleo,* and *synergos* each of which employs the *"sy"* prefix, which infers companionship or togetherness.[12] As Euodia and Syntyche have each *synathleo moi meta* – [struggled beside (NRSV), labored side by side (ESV)] with Paul, he now encourages his loyal companion to *syllambano* - play an active, in fact a labor intensive role in the endeavor for Euodia and Syntyche to be unified. The primary meaning of this verb *help* carries a strong sense of physical action: "seize, grasp, apprehend, catch, and take hold of

[12] Allred, Philippians 4:2-3: An Alternative View.

together.[13] The effort implied by Paul's use of the verb *syllambano,* coupled with the emphatic particle *kai,* and the verb of request *erotao,* stresses his sense of urgency as he enlists the help of his *loyal companion.*[14] But that's not all.

Remember Church, these epistles were to be read in the context of the entire congregation. Taking a step back if we consider the qualifying phrase, he makes to Euodia and Syntyche *in the Lord,* in verse two. Clearly, the issue is beyond a private matter but has implications for how the whole Philippian church represents the gospel – that is how they DO ministry. Paul reminds the *true companion*, AND the congregation as they listen, of the collaborative labor of Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and other fellow laborers of the gospel, some of whom, no doubt, were members of the congregation. His reminds the congregation that each person whom he has expressly named as well as those who are co-workers in the gospel have their names written in the book of life and of their collective responsibility to perpetuate unity. Hansen notes this reference has both eschatological and contemporary implications for the congregation. As Hansen explains:

> The citizens of the Roman colony of Philippi who have their names recorded in a civic register of citizens know that they have a duty to live in harmony and peace with one another. The citizens of the colony of heaven in the Roman colony of Philippi who have their names written in the book of life in heaven are called by their Lord above all powers to live in peace with one another.[15]

In other words, God wants us to stay together

The conflict between Euodia and Syntyche, as well as the implications for the congregation at Philippi demonstrate that as Christians, we are not impervious to life's

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[13] G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*: *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 285.

[14] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 284.

[15] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 286.

challenges to unity. Our love for God, our commitment to Christ nor does our submission to the Holy Spirit render any one of us immune to the subtle contamination of self-interests left unchecked, which can have far-reaching negative ramifications including disunity. But it's helpful to know that disunity is antithetical to God's Triune Existence. Therefore, like Paul has reminded the Philippians, we too must be aware of our triangular partnership between the people of God and our Lord, Jesus Christ, to glorify God through advancing the gospel – which is the call of the Church Universal. So church, while episodes of disunity may be a reality, as Christians it is incumbent on us to cancel the series and be of one mind and to labor in assisting others who name Christ as Lord to do the same. We must not only declare our allegiance to Christ and His gospel but it we are truly disciples it is imperative that we demonstrate our partnership in the gospel. Yes Friends, our partnership must be articulated by our actions in the context of unity that reflects Jesus Christ, our Eternal Exemplar. So Church, let's stay together… Let's stay together by doing life together. Serving together. Praying together. Working together. Suffering together. Weeping together. Rejoicing together. Growing together. Worshipping together. If we continue together here, one day we'll be around God's throne together. So, friends let's continue to join earthly hands now in preparation and anticipation of holding each other's eternal hands around the throne… I like the John Oatman Jr.'s words when he says: *Hand in hand we walk each day, Hand in hand along the way; Walking thus I cannot stray, Hand in hand with Jesus.*

Friends if you take Jesus's hand and I take Jesus hand's then He'll keep you from straying away from me, He'll keep me from walking away from you, and under the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit, we can stay together.

Sermon Two

We Belong Together

Psalm 133:1-3

In 2005 Mariah Carey won a Grammy for best female vocals for the song *We Belong Together,* from which we gleaned our sermonic tag. Like last week's sermon, *Let's Stay Together,* this song chronicles the frustration of someone who desires to be with their love interest despite tumultuous times and dilemmas. Speaking to her love interest, her sentiment is that irrespective of what we may go through, we belong together! In our text this morning, the worshiping warrior and psalmist, King David pens a psalm with similar sentiments.[16]

The psalm begins with an interjection that expresses strong emotion. It is an imperative that compels the hearer to examine, take notice, perceive, and comprehend what is happening. Behold, the psalmist David says, compelling those who participate in this worship song to go beyond the escapism of their momentary excitement and to dive into the theological ramifications of their shared experience. He wants them to not only gaze upon this experience of unity with their eyes but to grasp its profundity within their hearts and consciously consider the implications of the togetherness of those who share a common faith and a collective covenant relationship with God. So again, he says, Behold!

Behold. How good and How pleasant! Notice the superlative that David attaches to these descriptors. The word translated "how" in this context functions much like the

[16] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 477.

word “so” in our common vernacular. There is an understood difference between pretty and so pretty; big and so big. Ugly and so ugly. He says How good and how pleasant… Daniel Estes writes, “the vivid language with which the psalm begins, exclaims brothers living in unity is both intrinsically right and emotionally pleasant.”[17] Don’t miss it, David emphasizes both the ethical and experiential value of unity.

That unity is good has reference to its ethical value. He means unity aligns with the moral, social and behavioral values espoused in the covenant by which God governs His people. Unity is good morally because it promotes accountability. It’s good economically because it facilitates the stability of each person through support and it’s good socially because it fosters a sense of community. Unity is good ethically.

But Family, if “good" speaks to the ethical value of unity, then “pleasant” refers to the experiential value. When the people of God live in unity, they can find joy in being together. They receive comfort through being together. They can experience delight and gratification and pleasure all through unity with God and one another.

But there is another caveat. David suggests that it is not only important for God’s people, whom he affectionately calls brothers, to come together, but moreover, they must dwell together. As a nation, Israel was most visibly united when people of every tribe converged on Jerusalem for the great festivals.[18] This psalm is one of a group of fifteen worship psalms, which together constitute the Psalms of Ascent. These psalms, in antiquity, formed a praise and worship playlist that ancient believers would sing or chant

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[17] Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73–150*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 13, “New American Commentary” (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2019), 513.

[18] Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People of God*, ed. J. A. Motyer, vol. 2, The Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 243.

as they slowly made their way from their remote camps and settlements to the Holy City of Jerusalem to participate in the three yearly festivals that were commanded by God. The feast of weeks, the feast of booths and the Passover were each time of worship ordained by God for His people to commemorate and celebrate God's abundant favor that He lavished upon them throughout their rich history. As they journeyed from dispersed locations toward Jerusalem, these faithful travelers would no doubt face dangers, toils, and potential snares along the way. Whether from the robbers or weather, from lack of adequate provisions or ravenous predatory animals, despite the hazards and hardships and irrespective of their hang-ups, by God's grace, they remained together, not always physically but in spirit. On their way toward Jerusalem enduring their hardships separately, this song reminded them of the joy and the importance of togetherness. And certainly, it caused them, even more eagerly, to anticipate dwelling together when they reached the Holy City.

Family, maybe that's why God allows us to suffer hardships sometimes - to bring us closer together. It's something about going through storms, dealing with hard times or facing fears that draws you closer and makes you hold on to one another a little bit tighter. Roller coaster illustration... the ups and downs draw us closer together...

Roller Coaster Illustration...application

We know something about life's roller coaster, don't we? As a people who have historically endured the trials and tribulations of racism and oppression; the dangers of existing amongst those who hate you simply because your skin has been kissed by nature's sun, being marginalized and viewed as less than, especially in times past, we

learned to stay with one another and to stay with God. Together, God empowered us to make a little stretch a bit further. Together, God showed us how to pool our strength and resources to create colleges and universities where our children could further their education. Together, God strengthened our resilience. This is why despite unjust laws and unfair treatment we maintained hope in God to protect and preserve us. You can hear it in the lyrics of songs like *Precious Lord take my hand, Lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak and I am worn Through the storm, through the night, Lead me on to the light. Take my hand Precious Lord; lead me on.*

Like these lyrics helped to sustain hope in God and reminded our parents and grandparents of the need to stay connected to the LORD and one another; the Psalms of ascent in general and our text in particular reminded those who sung these words how God had and would graciously provide and protect them and that they too needed to stay connected to Him and one another by dwelling together in His Presence.

But as we further examine this principle and dynamic of unity, is it just about its ethical and experiential value? No family, the value and significance of unity is remarkably more than just about how it makes us feel. This is not what David is suggesting. We could certainly understand his appreciation for unity based on its experiential value alone, couldn't we? Why? Because he is one who experienced so much disunity. The account in 1 Samuel 15 that chronicles how David was overlooked by his father as a potential king of Israel highlights a certain emotional and expectational estrangement from his family does it not? And even after David ascended to the throne of Judah it was another seven years before He experienced the promise of God to reign as King of a united Israel. Then later, because of his actions, he experienced the division of his household pitting his son

Absolom against him. While we could understand his appreciation for unity based on his own life, I want to suggest again there's more. We see it in verse 2. ***It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the skirts of his robes!***

The Holy Spirit Endorses Us by His Presence.

Watch the imagery that David employs. He says unity is like the oil used to anoint Aaron. Aaron was the brother of Moses, the great emancipator of Israel. God chose Moses to lead Israel out of bondage, but He chose Aaron as Israel's high priest. God had Moses to anoint Aaron with a special blend of oil that could only be used to consecrate individuals – kings, priests, and prophets – ordained by God Himself. The oil represented the gift of God's Spirit that would enable these important officials to exercise their responsibilities effectively.[19]

It is significant for us not only because of the oil with which Aaron was anointed but also because of the office for which he was ordained. As the earthly high priest of physical Israel, Aaron foreshadows Jesus, who according to Heb. 4:14 is our eternal high priest of spiritual Israel, which is God's Church. And can I tell you something, family? Our eternal high priest Jesus Christ is also anointed.

Now we often use Christ as if it's Jesus's last name… Christ is not Jesus last name. Rather, it is a descriptive title. The word Christ is a translation of the Greek word Christos which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word Messiah. Listen, both Messiah and Christos, in their respective languages, translate to mean "anointed one!" So, like Aaron

[19] Tremper Longman, III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15–16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 439.

was anointed as the high priest from a temporal earthly perspective, Jesus is our anointed eternal high priest. Aaron was anointed with oil which flowed upon his head and on his beard and down to the garments which covered his physical body. Likewise, Jesus has been anointed, and that anointing is also present within Jesus' spiritual body.

In Exodus 30 we see the oil was used to consecrate Aaron to begin his ministry as high priest, but how does God consecrate His Son? Jesus answers that for us as he begins his ministry in Luke 4:16. Jesus announces it's not physical oil that is poured upon his head, rather he has been anointed with the Holy Spirit. And again, in the same way the oil flowed from the head of Aaron down to his robes or his body, the Spirit of God who anoints Jesus Christ who is our head is also present within his body which is his church.

This is important, family, because this scripture symbolizes that where there is unity amongst God's people, it is indicative of the anointing of His Spirit. In other words, when we're walking together in a way that shows our commitment to God and dedication to do His will, we're in alignment with our head, who is Christ. It is a sign, then, that we too, like Christ, are enabled by the Presence of the Holy Spirit.

Somebody missed it. He's present. I said the Holy Spirit is Present. When we present ourselves unified before God to worship Him, in submission and subjection to His will, through the witness of our faithful service it is because of the Holy Spirit's active Presence in our lives. I can say this so emphatically because most of Acts, and Eph. 4:3, godly unity is a function of the Spirit. That's why Highland Heights, it's so critical that we intentionally endeavor to maintain a posture of unity because to minister in a way that's pleasing to God, we need the endorsing and empowering Presence of His Holy Spirit. There's one more thing, Church.

Yes, we belong together worshiping, praying, serving, and demonstrating our submission to God. Because when we're unified in this way, not only will the Spirit endorse us with His Presence. He'll enable us with His Power to be productive. Notice verse 3. **The Holy Spirit Enables us with His Power - *Psalm 133:3*, "*It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."*** A bountiful land was part of the covenantal blessing that God pledged to His people if they remained obedient to His commandments. Deuteronomy 28 captures what they could expect. ***Deuteronomy 28:2-6***, "***And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.***

Mount Hermon is Israel's highest mountain at over 9,000 feet. Its three distinct peaks are visible from the Sea of Galilee some 60 miles away. Because of its height, it is also considered to be the holiest mountain in Israel. From this high holy mountain flows headwaters that go from Mount Hermon itself, down to the Sea of Galilee, bringing life and lushness to Israel which David calls Zion. Precipitation like dew, rain, and snow were viewed particularly in antiquity as agents of fertility and productivity. Israel was an agrarian society. To subsist and sustain their existence they depended upon the land's productivity, supported by the precipitation which alone God controls. The psalmist's sense is that as the copious dew on Mount Hermon provides life-enhancing moisture for

Israel's crops, so the blessing of unity produces life-enhancing relationships for the people of God.[20] So, David uses imagery – a vision of these life-sustaining elements of productivity that they knew only God could provide – to evoke the imagination of the worshippers.

It's an interesting picture that's painted by these words. It's almost like David is a receivers coach, trying to help his young players understand that some plays are designed based on position. The quarterback will throw the ball to a predetermined position, and it is expected for you to be in the right position to receive the ball. David says, when God's people exist in unity with a resolve to do the will of God, they are positioned to be the beneficiaries of productivity that only God himself can provide. They are in position to receive the blessing of life that God promised.

Friends, we also see this principle in the Book of Acts. Jesus made clear to His disciples that he was leaving, but He had a blessing for them. To be enabled and empowered to continue the ministry which he began they must remain in Jerusalem. Jesus told his disciples the blessing was on the way, but they needed to be in position to receive the promise. (Acts 1:4).

In Acts 2:1, the Bible says they were all together in one place. Somebody missed it! They were all together in one place. The Bible says the Holy Spirit came and filled all those who were in the house. And just in case you don't know the story, they were empowered to witness for Jesus. Throughout Acts, 3000, 5000, a family here, a group there. One here, a few there. People are being saved, lives are being changed, healing is taking place, and hearts are being mended. How? Because they have been together

[20] Estes, *Psalms 73–150*, 515.

empowered to preach Jesus! But it began when God's people were able to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit who endorsed them with His Presence and enabled them with His Power. This facilitated their productivity in ministry. But again, they needed to be in position. That position, Family, was together.

That's why I say we belong together, because when we are together:

- We acknowledge that Jesus, anointed by the Spirit lived, so we could be together. He died to free us from the debt of sin and through the enablement of the same Holy Spirit, so that we could be together. And on the third day, Jesus was raised, from death to life, so we could be together.
    - We say to God, we honor You and we submit to Your will for us, in love, by the power of Your Spirit to be bonded together
    - Demonstrate an understanding that as God eternally exists in community and because we're created in God's image God desires us to live in community together with God and one another.
    - We demonstrate that we understand the authority of the Holy Spirit who unifies us as the family of God, and followers of Jesus Christ.
    - Our unity serves as a sign that the Holy Spirit is Present and active in and among us
    - We affirm only through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit are we enabled to be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ and empowered to do ministry that exalts Christ and glorifies and pleases God.

Sermon Three

We Are One - John 17:20-22

The room is somber, and the disciples continue to recline around the table. The smell of the Passover meal they shared only moments ago still lingers. Their feet still glisten from the residual moisture of Jesus washing them after the meal. Judas has been dismissed to betray Him and the remaining disciples are being told about the coming of the Holy Spirit who will empower them to continue his ministry. Can you see their expressions of bewilderment and confusion? I imagine they're flooded with emotions. They're overwhelmed and perhaps experiencing information overload as they attempt to process all that has unfolded. But now Jesus shifts from speaking to them and begins talking to His Father. Jesus is preparing for the moment of the cross. Soon as priest and sacrifice, he will administer himself as the Lamb of God slain to take away the sins of the world.

In the ancient days when Israel worshiped God in the Tabernacle and eventually in the temple, the high priest was the only human permitted to come into God's Presence within the holiest of holies, and still only on the Day of Atonement. On that day, the high priest would remove his ornate garments of beauty and splendor, and after washing himself, put on simple linen garments to slay the required goat as the sacrifice to atone for the guilt of all Israel. He would then wash himself again; re-adorn himself with his priestly regalia and administer the burnt sacrifice along with the fat as the sin offering for the people.[21]

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[21] Trent C. Butler, "Day of Atonement," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

While this was a necessary endeavor and met God's requirements for the moment, according to Hebrews 10, these activities of the earthly high priest are a picturesque preview of the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ. We see this image in part as we look around this text even now because when the Holy Spirit initiated his mother Mary's conception, Jesus laid down glory. In His birth, Jesus took the form of a servant and labored as such, even in this episode of our text. But what he now prepares to do, is not offer the blood of bulls and goats like the earthly priest. Rather, as the eternal priest, he will apply his blood for the salvation of all with sincere faith in Him.

But watch it. Despite, or maybe because of the gravitas, the heaviness of the moment, Jesus appeals to the Father. Yes, Jesus makes time; he takes time to pray for his disciples as they will continue to witness on His behalf. I like it, Family because we know Jesus is ever the Master Teacher. Here, what Jesus demonstrates to us is in addition to the necessity of instruction and we must also appreciate the importance of intercession. So, he prays. Ever seeking to do God's will, it seems that Jesus words this prayer to not only steward the moment and posture himself to complete His mission but moreover to perpetuate God's glory. Jesus affords access to a conversation with His Father. This conversation assures his disciples of how God will use them, in unison with God's Self and one another, to facilitate others' faith in Jesus Christ, to the glory of God. So, Jesus prays in the presence of his disciples

He prays first concerning his **Eternal Existence - John 17:5**, "*And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."* You missed it! Jesus reminds those who listen in the moment and those of us who by faith, receive the word now, Who He is. In short, Jesus articulates His deity.

Beloved, though our Lord did not always demonstrate His divinity, He does not ever deny it. Here, however, the Son of God makes no secret that He is co-Eternal with his Father. That's right! I know we like the Christmas Story. But as the Son of God, Jesus's Existence did NOT begin in a feeding trough outside an inn in an obscure village on the backside of Judea. To the contrary, He has existed eternally with the Father, He has no beginning and has no end. Rather, He too as God's Son hails from eternity. But… as the old preacher says, for him, a body was prepared, and he traveled through 42 generations of time. Jesus, though divine, wrapped himself in humanity to ultimately die for the world's redemption from sin. Thus, in preparation and I believe as somewhat of motivation, Jesus looks to a time before His earthly conception and beyond the looming cross. He reflects on His eternal existence. He's reminded of and he prays for the glory he as God the Son had with God the Father before the world began! Jesus prays concerning His eternal existence.

He prays regarding **Earthly Experience**. John 3:35-36 and John 10:10, collectively capture Jesus declaring his reason for coming to earth – to afford those who would express faith in Him, eternal and abundant life. In our focus text for today, specifically in v3, Jesus says eternal life is not merely immortality but also an intimate revelation of God, that Jesus Himself, has been given complete authority to manifest. In other words, as he makes clear in v3. Eternal life is knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ whom the Father sent. Family, this is beyond a casual acquaintance. More than just a rendezvous on Sunday. An hour on Wednesday won't suffice. This knowing is characterized by a deep, intimate, and abiding relationship.

True story. A few years ago, I was going through the airport in Atlanta trying to make a connecting flight. I was traveling with some friends, one of whom is Pastor Derrick Fields, a brother who I didn't grow up with but, nevertheless, knows a great deal about me. As we're making our way to the gate, we hear someone say, "Doughboy!" Fields says, "Hey man somebody is calling you, and sounds like they 'know- know you.'" Sure enough, it was one of my buddies from high school that I'd not seen in over 20 years. Now Doughboy is my childhood nickname, so how could Pastor Fields come to this conclusion since we didn't grow up together? I'll tell you. He learned this in the context of our relationship. Through our friendship, some things have been revealed that only those who truly know one another can access.

Likewise, it's interesting that this revelation of God, which Jesus says is the basis of eternal life, also comes in the context of relationship. Notice verses 6-8. Jesus sums up his earthly experience as a completed assignment to make God known to those whom the Father entrusted to His care. *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they* ***have received them*** *and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have* ***believed*** *that you sent me.*

Received and believed. That's critical church because these actions indicate a faith upon which Jesus will build in the lives of His disciples. They receive and believe Who Jesus is, from Whom He's come, what He's come to do, why He's come to do it, and through Whom He will accomplish it. By faith, they accept Jesus's eternal existence. By faith, they obediently follow him in his earthly experience. I believe these elements

are profoundly important to undergird what Jesus, in the next phase of His prayer reveals that we must also accept by faith.

Integrated Identity

To be sure, verse 9 makes it clear. Jesus is praying for the believing community, specifically for those disciples who have been engaged in ministry alongside Him for the past three years. "*I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours."* Jesus knows his departure is imminent. While He has been on earth, He has protected his disciples in the Father's Name, and they have been obedient. But now, they will face the world without the benefit of Jesus's physical Presence. So, Jesus asks the Father to continue protecting them, (v.15) and to sanctify them (v.17). How will he do that? One way? Jesus has already explained in chapters 14-16. He says I'll ask my Father to send another Comforter to abide with you forever. This Comforter – another is one of the same kind; the same nature: holy, eternal, sovereign. This Comforter is the Holy Spirit, who will enable the disciples to accomplish the Lord's will. However, what Jesus prays for in our immediate text is his disciples' unity. See verse 11.

I'm grateful for Jesus's care for the disciples in this text. What blows my mind, however, is Jesus's love is so strong, and his intentions are so resolute that the unity for which he prays is not limited to the disciples in His immediate Presence. Church, the unity for which Jesus prays, includes all disciples for all times. Moreover, it includes being united with God Himself. *John 17:20-23 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you,*

Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. I know we're outside black history month, but we celebrate our history every day and every month, don't we? As such, there is a concept from our motherland that I believe can illustrate this integrated identity for which Jesus prays. It's a concept called Ubuntu. It's an abbreviated way of saying *I am because we are.*[22] Now, Family, we know we can never change God's identity, but God does change ours. In John 17 Jesus illuminates for us how He and His Father have always existed in community. We know from other passages like Matthew 28:19-20 and 2 Corinthians 13:14, as well as, John chapters 14-16 that this godhead community also includes the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in this text, implies that because of who God is, when we come into a relationship with Him, our identity is changed. We become holy. We become saints. We become a part of God's family such that it reflects Him. We are because He is! And a key component of who God is, which He desires us to reflect is His existence in His community. So keen is God for us to exist in His community, that God invites us to be unified with Him. God says you're better when we're together! But why is it so important to be in unity with God? When we're together with God, We're: Afforded God's Peace, Blessed with God's Protection, Empowered by God's Spirit, and Developed in God's Love. Yes, family when we're in unity with God; when we're on the same page as the Lord we're more prone to: Eagerly adopt His mindset, Joyfully receive His mandates, Willingly participate in His ministry,

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[22] Dion A. Forster, "African Relational Ontology, Individual Identity and Christian Theology," *Theology Sage Publications* 113, no. 874 (July 2010): 243-253.

and Passionately share in His mission. When we're together, Jesus says the world knows I love you; you love me, and God loves you, like God loves me. When we're together, Jesus says, it reveals who you are as my disciples and demonstrates who I am as God's Son.

So Family, like God is One, we are one. Yes, we have an Integrated Identity. I can't become all that God intends me to be without concern for you. You won't fulfill who God has called you to be without concern for me. We're mutually connected in and through Christ Jesus! Jesus changes us. He changes our identity so no longer are we self-absorbed silos who are concerned only with filling up our individual coffers with what fulfills us alone. Instead, I am intent on using whatever God gifts me; to help you develop so that together we can make God, through the example of Jesus Christ and the enablement of the Holy Spirit, known to the world. So, Friends in the words of that great prophet Frankie Beverly. "*We are one*, *I'm talking about me and you*. *We are one*. *God's Love will see us through*. *We are one*. *And that's the way it is We are one…*" And as he says in another volume: "*Like the flowers need the rain*, *I need you*
like a blind man needs his cane, I need you. Like the darkness needs the night and the moonglow needs the light, I need you.

I don't know about you, but to me, that sounds like somebody who understands unity. It sounds like someone who knows and appreciates the benefits of being together. Unity and togetherness, that we might be one, that's what Jesus desired. He prayed for us to be one… Jesus died for us to be one. God raised Him up! I said that's a benefit Jesus provides as He gets up on resurrection ground – the possibility for us to be one; that's what He asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit to facilitate that we might be one not

only in concept but in conduct. So church, let's keep being one family, one people, united in faith, united in prayer, united in purpose and united with and in God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Sermon Four

Walk this Way - Ephesians 4:1-6

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

As a father, I think one of the most rewarding experiences of my children's formative years was watching them learn to walk. As they explored new environments and learned to navigate their way through hazards, potential threats, and even changes in terrain, it was necessary for us as parents to not only tell them where to walk but also how to walk. I'm sure some of you can remember teaching your children, or maybe those with extraordinary memories can recall receiving instruction from your parents, admonishing you that you don't walk with the same abandon on snow or ice as you do on lush green grass. You don't walk the same when it's warm outside as you do when it's cold or rainy. You'd say be careful, slow down, or even walk a little faster! In essence, every parent was saying, Walk this way.

In our text this morning, the Apostle Paul is saying to the saints in Ephesus that they too ought to walk this way. As he opens chapter 4, Paul drops a clue to his readers that he is not writing from a place of theoretical conjecture, or hypothetical commentary but rather everything he writes is also his commitment as a faithful follower of Christ, as

one who has himself learned from the Savior how to walk. He says I'm a prisoner of the Lord. In other words, Paul has been imprisoned for his commitment to Christ Jesus.

> "The fact that his life in and for Christ had led to imprisonment did not mean that he requested the sympathy of his readers, but it added intensity to his appeal, as now he wished to speak to them concerning the whole manner of their life. He has set before them the great purpose of God in Christ for his church. He has prayed that they may know the wonder of his plan, his love, his power, and every spiritual blessing that he offers. And now in these remaining chapters, he is going to write about the quality and kind of life that is demanded of them individually and in the fellowship of Christ's church."[23]

So just as Paul's commitment reflects his calling, he now – with care, compassion, and conviction – encourages the saints in Ephesus, to individually and collectively, as the church, live in congruence with God's calling upon them. He says to walk worthy of your calling. The image that he intends to convey is that of a balanced scale. He implies that when a believer's walk is measured and compared to the worth of their calling in God, they should present as balanced on the scales of valuation.

I'm sure I have some company in the room who remembers a time when we'd go to the corner store and ask for $3 worth of hoop cheese $5 worth of bologna. We expected the product to be commensurate with the value of the money we would give to the store clerk. We'd be sorely disappointed to feel that we didn't get our money's worth. I think we understand worthy, but what does Paul mean when he says WALK worthy? What, exactly, is this walk? Well Beloved, Scripture often uses the image of walking to describe godly living.

- Deuteronomy 30:15-16 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. [16] If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command

[23] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 114–115.

> you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

- Gen 5:21-24 says of a godly man named Enoch that he walked with God.

What these verses and our foundational text communicate is a life that is characterized by godly conduct. In essence then, what Paul means in our text is that a believer's conduct should match their call. In other words, "God's calling establishes the norm or criterion to which their conduct should conform."[24]

In our hyper-critical judgments, often, we make this assessment of others, don't we? Whether out loud or in our thoughts, we say, "He sure doesn't act like a Christian!" "She sure doesn't dress like a child of God!" "Are you sure they're saved?" The story is told of a woman who continuously criticized her neighbor for what she perceived as her the young woman's inability to wash effectively. She criticized her neighbor for having dingy sheets. I'd be ashamed to hang those dingy sheets out on the line, she'd tell other neighbors. Imagine her surprise when it was revealed that it wasn't the neighbor's sheets that were dingy. It was this woman's windows that were dusty!

My point is this. While God certainly has standards for our behavior, we must be careful in assessing others through our skewed point of view. Thankfully, Paul in the subsequent verses will give us godly characteristics of our walk rather than have us

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[24] S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 293.

justify ourselves and disqualify others based upon our own myopic perspectives. But if we're going to walk worthy of the calling, we must first examine it…

The Calling of Those Who Walk

Friends, let me first emphasize that our calling or vocation (KJV) is not something that any of us have earned. Rather, this vocation, this position, this place of honorable service is one to which God himself has invited, gifted, and entrusted to every believer. And as such, we must walk, that is, we are charged to live in a way that honors both the calling itself and God, the Caller. While we don't know, nor can we know, everything about God, we do know some things about God's nature, don't we? What is it that we know about God? We know God is holy. We know God is just. God is gracious. We know God is merciful. So, since we know these things about the Call-er, we must investigate the nature of the calling, especially since Paul references it specifically.

Staying in the context of the epistle we see the characteristics of the calling in 1:4-5. even as he (God) chose us in him (Jesus Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be **holy** and **blameless** before him. Listen, God has chosen, or better God calls us to

- Holiness – moral purity. Holiness is more than the chief attribute of God, it is the conception of His consummate perfection and total glory.[25] Everything God is, everything God does flows out of God's holiness. Because God is sovereign and

[25] Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 211.

because God is holy, in spite of believers' past sins, through the substitutionary work of Christ, God can designate believers as holy.

- Blameless – freedom from condemnation, This Blamelessness is through no prowess of our own. Being blameless does not mean that we're innocent. Instead, the condemnation that should rightfully go to us has been satisfied, in our case by the sovereign redemption of God seen foremost in the finished work of Jesus Christ through Whom God calls us into a relationship with Himself.[26]

And since God, in response to our faith in Christ, and through His blood, has designated, that is God has called believers into holiness and rendered believers blameless, God then expects our conduct to match our calling. But what then does this mean practically? How can we through our walk, that is our mindset, behaviors, and conduct, reflect a holy God and a holy call?

Qualities of The Walk

Paul, in verse 2, provides some descriptors that offer insight into how these attributes should characterize believers' walk. He says walk this way… Walk what way? A believer's walk, Paul writes, should be saturated with humility, gentleness, and patience. Interestingly, these qualities in general and humility in particular, were seen as disadvantageous in the popular Greek culture which dominated Ephesus at the time of this epistle. Ancient Greeks, like many in our contemporary society, perceived that living a full lifestyle meant having no room for humility. But as disciples of Christ, as His

[26] Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London, UK: Martin Manser, 2009).

Church, and as those who follow His example, the thinking, values, and priorities of believers must be reoriented. Isn't that right? Aren't we encouraged to not conform to this world but rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds? Are we not taught to let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus? Therefore, as Jesus humbled himself, we too should be intent on incorporating humility as an integral component of our character. No wonder the Bible says God resists, opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. But there's more…

Gentleness or meekness, in other translations, is a quality with an emphasis on discipline. The background of the word envisages a powerful animal that is under complete control. Its strength is in no way diminished, its power remains profound, yet the animal is now submissive to the one who wields authority. Don't miss it Church. Those of us who express faith in Jesus have voluntarily subjected ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As a result, Church, believers then surrender themselves to the instructions of Christ through Scripture and the influence of the Holy Spirit. We look to the Word and depend on the Spirit for guidance, for discernment and to facilitate within us a disciplined character that honors God and is reflective of Christ.

We understand that, often the world views Jesus as docile, unassuming, and even weak. But remember this is the same Jesus who overturned the tables in the temple court. It's the same Jesus who chased the extortioners out with a whip. It's the same Jesus, who endured the lashes of the whip on his back, and even while on the cross, could call legions of angels to assist and avenge him, yet he allowed himself to remain under Father's control and authority. Not weak but meek! Not cowardly but controlled. Not docile or demure but disciplined!

Patience is often used to describe one's ability to endure suffering, hardship and circumstantial adversity. In this context, however, Paul is addressing a believer's temperament. It is an intentional disposition where one chooses to be slow to anger. It is an exercise in restraint, a decision not to retaliate even when you've suffered hurt.

All these attributes, humility, meekness, and patience are to be incorporated into the character of every believer. Because each of these were elements of Jesus's personality, they should also be integral to our own. In other words, they should describe who we are. It's not that s/he can't go there with you, s/he chooses not to… Remember beloved irrespective of how the world sees it, your humility, gentleness, and patience are not a measure of cowardice but control, it doesn't indicate fear but rather faithful submission to the influence of the Holy Spirit and the example of Christ.

Truth be told it's much easier to allow your temper to flare, your words to fire someone up and your fists to fly! What's hard is maintaining your composure when you want to curse, treating others with respect when you feel you've been disrespected, and acting like Christ when you're dealing with devils! That's why God, through Paul, encourages us to be humble, to be meek, and to be patient. Because who God calls us to be, is integral and paramount, for what God calls us to do! The qualities of our walk inform the conduct of our walk.

The Conduct of Those Who Walk

What is the conduct of those who walk? In a word, a believer's conduct should be love. The word Paul uses for love in this context is agape. It is unconditional love. It's love without limits. This kind of love is expressed in the context of our relationships as

what Paul calls forbearing one another. It means I've predetermined to carry you, and you've predetermined to carry me even when we become burdensome to one another. It means loving one another through disappointment, weakness, and offense. I hear you saying Pastor why would I keep loving somebody who hurt me? Why would I love someone who offends me? Why would I keep loving somebody who caused me grief and disappointment? Can I tell you? Because God did it and God does it for you and me! No wonder the Bible says in Isaiah 53:5, "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; and the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

Church, we offend God, but God keeps on loving us; we disappoint God, but God keeps right on loving us. We grieve God, but God still loves us because God desires to maintain a relationship with us. And family if we're going to follow God's example then we must do the same. Why? Because we love God, and you can't love God without loving God's people. God in the Person of the Holy Spirit has ordained that we be connected; together; unified. When you and I allow God to teach us to walk so that we become humble, gentle, and patient, we also learn to forbear one another and, in this way, Paul says we help maintain the unity that the Holy Spirit has already established. This is why those qualities are so important; they facilitate the function or the goal of our walk – what God wants to accomplish. So, what is God's goal?

Goal of Our Walk

" …making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" Ephesians 4:3. God has called us to be humble, gentle, and patient. These are the qualities

of our walk that help us learn to forbear one another in love which is the overarching tenor of our walk. But the ultimate reason God expects us to live in this way is because it reflects God and God's purpose and plan.

God intends to be reflected in the life of His Church. As believers, an important way we do this is by endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Paul says believers together are to endeavor, to make every effort to keep, that is to maintain, the unity of the Spirit. Notice believers are not called to create unity but rather to strive together to keep unity. Yes, believers are to keep unity through the bond, the connection, and the ties of peace. This peace is not based on whether we always agree with one another. This peace, this togetherness, this unity was established through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jews and Gentiles who, before Christ, had been at odds and were diametrically opposed to one another, through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus, are brought together into one people – a new identity in the Spirit (Eph. 2:15). Jesus preached peace (2:17) made peace and IS our peace (2:14). So, believers' unity, our peace, our togetherness, is not based on us, but on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, our goal, again, is not to create unity but to make every effort to maintain that unity. But how? He's already told us through the qualities and conduct of our walk. These characteristics facilitate the fulfillment of our goal.

Watch it; he says he wants us to endeavor to keep unity. However, in verse two Paul says it must happen in the context of love, humility, gentleness, and forbearance (patience). Watch the wisdom of God. He says these are qualities that will foster unity. Think about it. It's hard to stay connected to someone if you're arrogant and prideful. It's hard to stay connected to someone if you're not concerned with how you treat them, it's

hard to be unified if you're unwilling to forgive and exercise patience. But when believers allow the Holy Spirit to cultivate, within us, the character of Christ who Himself is humble, gentle, forgiving, and patient, then maintaining unity becomes more probable. Through the enablement of the Spirit as He transforms us to develop character and conduct that is consistent with the character of Jesus, we can then maintain peace and unity with our brother even when we've been offended. We can keep unity and peace with our sister even if we've been wronged. I'm not saying we become a doormat, but we can confront our issues with humility gentleness, and grace, facilitating the fulfillment of the goal of our call, despite the frailties of our humanity, because we've been empowered by the Holy Spirit to keep the unity that God has created.

The Witness in our Walk

"There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope at your calling — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:4-6. The concluding verses of our pericope illuminate the unity God intends us to show as we walk together. So often in our sectarian expressions of the gospel, what we proclaim seems to be exclusive. This was the case that Paul was arguing against. He wanted the saints to know there was not a body for Jews that was separate from Gentiles. We observe the same proclivities in our houses of worship today. Sometimes it seems there is a body for the rich, a body for the poor, a gospel for blacks, and a gospel for whites, a gospel for the churches of Christ, Baptists, and Methodists. What has resulted is division in our expression of Christianity. We all say we worship the same God, but we are divided. But watch it. Paul says just as we only

have one mortal body with one spirit, so too Christ has only one body and there is only one Spirit – the Holy Spirit of God, who empowers His Body.

Friends, Paul is preaching an inclusive gospel. This is why Jesus said, whosoever will, let him come. Come where? We come into His one unified body of believers. One body, one Spirit, one hope – the hope we have by faith in Christ to be received eternally into intimate and uninhibited fellowship with God. But if we're going to realize that hope it can only happen through one Lord – Jesus Christ, God the Son, who died on Calvary's cross and was raised on the 3rd day for your sins and mine. One body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith – Paul emphasizes doctrine, in other words, what we believe or better in Whom we believe. We must understand that he is not addressing preferences in our worship styles – whether we clap or not, how many worship songs we sing, if there is one song leader or a praise team, if we praise quietly, or if we're expressive in praise. Someone may get upset but Paul is not concerned with instrumental or acapella music here. The faith, or the doctrine of which Paul is speaking, is the fundamental belief, the uncompromising faith in the life, work, sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God as our Sufficient Savior and the basis of our salvation. One baptism refers to the principle expressed in 1 Corinthians 12:13 "*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and we were all given one Spirit to drink."* Finally, he says one God and Father of all who is in all believers and moves and works through all His children. Notice Family, the Trinitarian existence of God – one God and Father, one Lord Jesus Christ and one Holy Spirit. Friends as God exists in perfect unity within Himself, He desires the same for His Church. That's why

Paul lists seven ones: Body. Spirit. Hope. Lord. Faith, Baptism. God. Seven is the number of completions. He says He wants us to be COMPLETELY unified.

"Blest be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers; our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares. We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear. When we are called to part, it gives us inward pain; but we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again. This glorious hope revives our courage by the way; while each in expectation lives and waits to see the day. From sorrow, toil, sin and pain, we shall one day all be free; and perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity."

The qualities of our walk, the conduct of our walk, the function of our walk – our lifestyles should reflect the paternal relationship that God has with us, not just individually but collectively. As a result of His divine call on your life and my life, humility, meekness, and patience should permeate our character. Because we desire to honor God and fulfill His purpose each of us should strive wholeheartedly to walk this journey out together, maintaining the unity that God has already established through the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ and by His Holy Spirit. Evangelize in unity, pray, praise, serve, forgive, rejoice, celebrate. Sorrow, weep, glorify God in unity.

Sermon Five

The Danger of Division - 1 Corinthians 1:10ff; 3:1ff

The phrase *divide et impera*, which evolved into divide and conquer, is often used in political, legal, and military conversations. Neither the origin of this ideology nor its strategic application in the previously mentioned disciplines is known. Historically, however, the strategy was employed by Phillip of Macedon, his son Alexander the Great, Napolean, and other military leaders in their conquests of foreign nations. It was such an effective strategy that it also influenced and became Roman military policy in their quest to expand the empire into a world superpower, and likewise, Great Britain in their colonization endeavors.[27]

While we understand the implementation of this scheme in the political and social arenas, we must also know it can be used in the spiritual context. Satan, the Bible says is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. A chief strategy of these types of predators is to separate their prey from the group to increase the likelihood of subduing and conquering their target. Identify, isolate, then dominate, in other words, divide and conquer.

Jesus himself recognized the animus of division and its threat to any group of people. This is why Matthew records him saying in Matthew 12:25 "… every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand…" Perhaps Paul has this in mind when, in continuation of the ministry of Christ, he

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[27] Indiria Falk Gesink, Divide and Rule: "The Legacy of Roman Imperialism" in *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism Since 1450: A-E* (MacMillan Reference Library, 2007), 305.

admonishes the saints in Corinth, directly, those of us who now profess to be Jesus' disciples, about the danger of division.

The apostle reminds the believers of the Lord's expectations in 1 Cor. 1:10 "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." Notice first how Paul engages the believers. He says, I appeal, I beseech (KJV). The word expresses a call to one's side. In other words, Paul is requesting help with an endeavor in which he's already engaged. It's a lesson in leadership. We should never ask others what we are unwilling to do ourselves. Better still – our requests are preceded by personal participation and effort. Prayer. Commitment. Presence. Paul has demonstrated these values personally and he calls the Corinthians alongside him for unity with Christ and unity within Christ. This appeal is based on the name of Jesus – His authority, Lordship, and position of priority in the believer's life. In other words, because Jesus is our Lord individually, we will also submit to His will collectively. And with this in mind, we are not uniform, but we will be unified. We stand in unison affirming the teachings of Christ, holding sacred what He esteems, and avoiding what He detests. We collectively affirm His sovereignty, preeminence, and priority and we, therefore, make whatever adjustments are necessary individually to fit together collectively. We strive to agree – mending what is broken and restoring what has been damaged. Why, so that in our relationships with one another, we can exemplify the love that Christ has for us all.

But why is it necessary for Paul to make this appeal? You know, like I do that wherever there are people there will also be problems! Unfortunately, the Church is not immune. As such, some behaviors and conduct exist within this body of believers in our

text that are contradictory to Christ. Paul says there is quarreling - contentions (KJV), strife, cliques, factions among you (v. 11). We see it in members within the same body exalting their alignment, with Peter, Paul, or Apollos above Christ. Sadly, instead of the preeminence of Christ, they had allowed themselves to become prideful and boastful about their preference for preachers, which began to create divisions. This is noteworthy because while we may not be divided along those lines, anything that we allow to create factions or the spirit of competition between believers is problematic and dangerous. Why, you ask?

Discloses Spiritual Immaturity

1 Corinthians 3:1 – But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. Paul says this contentious thinking, cliquish behavior that is so prevalent among these saints is preventing him from being able to address the believers as spiritual people and, instead, it's necessary to speak to them as infants. Verse 3 provides evidence, as this lack of spiritual maturity is characterized by the word flesh, or carnal (KJV). What he means is some of the Corinthians displayed a lack of discipline where they either had not yet learned or more sadly, failed to practice submitting to the Spirit of God. This is important because it is the Spirit who leads believers to bring our thinking, behaviors, and desires into alignment with Christ. Romans 8:5 those who set their minds on the Spirit, walk [or live] according to the Spirit. Instead, the Corinthians were motivated by their passions, emotions, and desires. In other words, they were behaving like children. Their minds were focused on what I want, what I like; who I want, who I like, which became the driving force in their attitudes,

affections, and actions. Brothers and sisters, that kind of behavior may be ok for a club, but it's disruptive for a household. It's disruptive for your house and for God's house. You're looking at me funny this morning. But you know, if you have children, especially young children – you love them, you're sensitive to their needs. However, you don't allow their immature desires or demands to determine the direction of your house. Why, because you know if left unchecked, their immature desires would lead to some indulgences that would cause problems for their health individually and the well-being of your entire household. What do you mean preacher? Imagine you're in the store, and the children have seen money in your wallet or your purse. They don't understand why they can't have the candy or the toy they want because they've seen the money that can provide for their desires. You, on the other hand, because you're mature, understand the requested money has been designated for another purpose, and it would be unwise to spend it on frivolous desires. They throw a tantrum. What happens if you give in? What may be the long-term implications? If you relent, perhaps you begin to create an expectation that will eventually create further issues. Do you see it? The division is like a child focused on their individual likes and desires at the expense of the health of the whole household. And so, when believers engage in divisive behaviors it discloses our spiritual immaturity and shows our inability to function as mature saints. This is an issue because some things can only be discerned spiritually. The need for sacrifice. The wisdom of patience. The health of the whole. Submission to Christ as opposed to selfishness. Division is dangerous because it's a sign of spiritual immaturity. But it is also dangerous because division places restrictions on our development.

Limitations to Development

1 Corinthians 3:2 – "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready." Paul continues with this infancy motif. He says division is dangerous because it limits your spiritual diet, which by implication, limits your development. Family, you know like I know that you don't feed infants the same thing you feed adults. Look at what Paul says. The saints couldn't handle solid food. Understand the tension between how Paul characterized them contrasted with how they view themselves. It's interesting because Corinth was a place of culture, it was a metropolis that included people of significant wealth and education, people who were well-versed in the mores of their modern social hierarchy. They were intelligent, socially sophisticated, and culturally conscious, yet spiritually, they were babies. They required milk. Paul infers that he needed to adjust, not the quality of his teaching, but the quantity of principles he could teach and the pace at which he could progress. He needed to be slower and less substantial in his presentations than would be required with mature saints. Certainly, you can imagine the consequences.

This reminds me, I once had a student who was 13, in the 8th grade, but the child only ate yogurt, pudding, and other soft foods. He still sucked a bottle at home. This wasn't because of any physical limitations but because he refused to eat anything else, his parents allowed it to continue which eventually led to cognitive delays in his development. Now, you're appalled by this. But Paul alludes to the same thing, and I want you Church, to come closer and think about the spiritual implications for a moment. How might immaturity impact a congregation's witness? How might the inability to handle a robust diet of the Word, hinder a church's development? What

would spiritual immaturity and delayed spiritual development mean for the health and continuity of that community of faith? And to think, these are the things to which division, caused by strife and jealousy, alludes and facilitates. And I hear you saying because you are great readers and listeners, “Brother pastor, I’m not jealous of anyone!” The word jealousy here is not suggestive of desiring what someone else has but rather that a person is so emphatic about their desires that they are dismissive and potentially disrespectful of others. But Family, the real question is how immaturity and delayed development affect our representation of Christ.

Diminish the power of the cross

1 Corinthians 1:13-17, “Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

Paul emphasizes that it is not specific personalities, our preferences, or our prowess that hold real power. It is through proclaiming the life and work of Jesus Christ and the Person of the Holy Spirit that produces conviction and change in someone’s life. Romans 1:16 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and to the Greek. Our role as disciples is to be living examples of the impact of the cross, to be credible witnesses to the transformative power of God. When we prioritize our cliques, our connections, or

even our congregation over the cross, it is idolatrous. We rob Christ of the esteem he deserves and contribute to the weakening of the church's collective witness. It is a dangerous, and damaging blow to our credibility as witnesses because the resulting disunity contradicts the identity and character of God. Family, when we cease to be credible witnesses for God, we may as well remove "Church" from our designation and replace it with "Club!"

I'm not saying don't invite people to worship with you. I'm not saying you shouldn't promote the fact that you're growing here. My point is that we never allow personalities or certain groups within this community of faith to be superimposed over Christ Jesus. Who we are and what we do is not about self, it's not about this church specifically. It is not about our preferences or our personalities. Rather, it's about the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's about the kingdom of God. Let's pray.

Sermon Six

In times of crisis, it is often helpful for entities under duress, to hear from those of influence or leadership. In the wake of the insensitivity of erroneous comments by so-called leaders, coupled with continued, though not reported, brutal and inhumane treatment, and murders of a growing list of brown and black men and women, this country is in crisis and craves the voice of competent leadership. Fortunately, during their crisis, the Galatian believers do not experience the same void of godly leadership as exists within these not-yet United States. Still, the crisis is the impetus of the Letter to the Galatians.

It is written to address the promulgation of another gospel by those who have begun to trouble the Galatian believers. At the core of the crisis is the determination of which gospel is authentic. Is it the original gospel preached by Paul or is it what he describes as, a gospel contrary to what [they] have received (NRSV) *from him*? And even more specifically in question, are the issues of circumcision and the soteriological impact of works of the law. But crouched within Paul's argument against this other gospel and the works of law, he recounts an episode of hypocrisy that if left unchecked, has the potential to cause upheaval within the fellowship of the church. Friends if we are honest within the proverbial halls of Christendom we are facing a similar episode. In the wake of stark racism and bigotry, there is an eerily familiar posture in those who with their words praise and extol God, but with their ways affirm the continued systemic degradation and oppression of others who are also created in His image. While it seems that such actions are only socially motivated, these actions reflect a faith that has been hijacked by

hypocrisy. In short, soteriology cannot be separated from sociology. That is our salvation must be expressed through believers' demonstration of the principles and effects of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is our thrust as we aim for the Word of God to help us demonstrate a faith that is not hijacked by hypocrisy.

Peter Examined

The story of Paul's conflict with Peter begins in Galatians 2:11. However, this was a novel dynamic in terms of their relationship with one another. Earlier in Galatians 2:9, Paul speaks of Peter with complimentary language, describing him as discerning, a pillar of the Church, and a welcoming brother.[28] At this point, Peter is someone for whom Paul has a great deal of respect. He is cognizant of Peter's history with Jesus, as well as his prominent position within the church and of the subsequent influence that he possesses. This is observed in the fact that Paul presents himself to James, Cephas (Peter), and John and that he emphasizes that they extend to him the right hand of fellowship, serving in this sense to articulate to the readers not only his call from Christ but also his acceptance by the Apostles and Leaders of the Church. Clearly, Peter's influence is not lost by Paul. This perhaps is what makes Peter's subsequent actions so much more potentially damaging to this community of faith.

Paul begins to chronicle the events that led to the conflict between Peter and himself. He suggests that for some time during Peter's visit to Antioch, he had been eating with the Gentile believers there. With this practice, Paul has no disinclination and from the preceding verses, it would appear to be the same for Peter. Although this

[28] J. R. W. Stott, "The Message of Galatians" in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 49.

practice is a departure from those who are devout observers concerning Jewish dietary customs, it is not a surprise to witness this congenial behavior in Peter. We learn from Acts 15, that at the Jerusalem Council, Peter relates how God used him to usher the Gentiles into a relationship with Him. This reference is to both his revelation from God that preceded him evangelizing the Gentile, Cornelius in Acts 10, as well as his experience with Cornelius himself. Peter was admonished by God against referring to certain foods as unclean and subsequently instructed to go to Cornelius' house to preach the gospel to him. While there he witnessed Cornelius, and his household receive the Holy Spirit in like manner as had other disciples of Christ. Certainly, these experiences, in concert, had a profound influence on Peter's perspective relative to Gentile believers which is evidenced by his address at the Jerusalem Council and in our text, his fellowship with them at the table.[29] So what would make Peter respond the way he did?

Peter's response to pressures

Though Peter, as we observe, is initially open to fellowship with the Gentiles, this eventually changes. It should be noted the verb *synesthio* rendered by the phrase to eat with, is in the imperfect tense, suggesting not only did Peter eat with the Gentiles once, but that he did so repeatedly or habitually. In other words, this had become his practice. This was his norm. This was his routine. Every day at lunchtime as they took their respite, Peter could be seen at the table of fellowship with the Gentiles. At the appearance of men from James, however, Peter removes himself from the table of fellowship with the Gentiles. The verb that Paul uses to describe Peter's withdrawal from the table is *hupostello.* Interestingly, this verb is sometimes used to describe military

[29] G. W. Hansen, *Galatians* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

maneuvers or political posturing with the intent of ensuring safety.[30] Further, the second verb *aphorizo,* rendered separated, is a term that depicts "cultic separation from the unclean."[31] This gives insight into Peter's possible motivation. It appears, based on Paul's words, that Peter's actions were a tactical maneuver designed to insulate himself by appearing to demonstrate a belief that the Gentiles were unclean and thus, by implication, unsaved. Paul goes on to say that it was because of fear of the circumcision party. Somehow, this behavior observed in Peter compels me to believe that he has some relatives here in 2024. Ties to disenfranchised communities are permissible when it helps your influence. Being my brother is commendable at the Racial Reconciliation Summit. But when the base shows up, when the situation demands that you not be counter-cultural to the establishment, when it's not so convenient, without warning, you remove yourself. Clearly, Paul, like many of us, has formed his own opinion of Peter's motives. But before we can make conclusive interpretations about his motive, it is necessary to explore who the men from James and the Circumcision Party were and what leverage they exerted to influence Peter's calculated response.

The Men and the Party Examined

Paul shrouds the individuals mentioned in a cloak of anonymity to the peripheral readers. Certainly, the Galatians, to whom he was writing, were aware of who he referred to as "men from James."[32] However, we are not so certain. Are those who belonged to the

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[30] H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979).

[31] Betz, *Galatians.*

[32] Hansen, *Galatians.*

Circumcision Party a different group? Hansen suggests that the Circumcision Party is an additional reference to the men from James. Furthermore, these men perhaps claimed that James sent them to bolster their position and to add credence to their message, which suggests they are Jewish Christians.[33] They are Christians, yet they are still part of the dominant culture, and it seems as though they are pushing this idea that unless these Gentile believers assimilate to their dominant culture then somehow the validity of their relationship with God is in question. If I'm honest, this angers me. It angers me that some people believe that it is their job to validate my relationship with God. For some, if I don't think like them, I can't be a child of God. For some, if I don't act like them, then I can't be a child of God. For others, if I don't look like them then I can't be a child of God. But I'm glad that I don't need a man to validate my relationship with God, I don't have to allow my faith to be upset because the foundation of the Lord stands sure, in that He knows those who are His.

What were their motives? What do they say, or represent, that results in such an abrupt change in his position? Although there may be some lingering questions about their identity, we can make plausible inferences about their intent and the obvious influence that they exert on Peter. Their presence must have been intimidating enough to Peter that he withdrew and separated himself, in response. If we consider these factors - that they are at least loosely associated with James and they made demands based on their understanding of the Jerusalem agreement, then they may have accused Peter of violating the agreement. As Betz suggests, Peter continues that under the agreement. Peter as a Jew would have continued his Jewish way of life to include the dietary and purity laws,

[33] Stott, *Galatians,* 50

which resulted in a demand for separation from Gentiles during table fellowship. This would have been acutely significant for the diaspora.[34] Hansen offers that these Jews and Peter may have been concerned that his fellowship with the Gentiles would diminish his credibility with non-Christian Jews, whom they hoped to evangelize or would subject Christian Jews to avoidable duress at the hands of Jewish nationalists because of their association with him.[35] This is interesting because even today, some refuse or willfully neglect the principles of God in preference of maintaining influence with those who refuse to submit to God. Political affiliations over personal relationship with God. Business opportunities over building the Kingdom. Friends over the family of God. Constitution over the Bible. Flag over faithfulness! Whatever the mitigating factors may have been, Peter made a conscious decision to alter his behavior at the appearance of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. It was this action as well as its theological inferences and implications, to which God is so vehemently opposed.

Paul's Response Examined

Paul's immediate response to Peter was to confront him. As he describes in Galatians 2:11, he "opposed him…" (NRSV). The term *anthistemi,* rendered opposed, is etymologically a military or political term. This is interesting because, as discussed earlier Peter's action is described by Paul, employing the use of *hupostello,* another military term. It appears that Paul decides he must match Peter's evasive maneuvers with similar force. Paul not only addresses Peter "before them all" but also includes the

[34] Betz, *Galatians.*

[35] Hansen, *Galatians.*

account in his epistle for the benefit of the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.[36] This is informative. Some suggest protest is not the job of a Christian. Some suggest that racism and other social ills should not be a concern of Christians. Paul's actions here seem to subvert those notions. He confronts the faction of believers, specifically Peter, who he believes are acting in a way that is contradictory to the will of God. Peter, because of his position, because of his influence, and perhaps because he is a part of the majority culture, in this episode is representative of power, prestige, and privilege. I believe that the Gentile Christians, perhaps would have been reluctant to openly criticize the obvious duality in Peter's behavior. But Paul was not. Here he exemplifies God's word in Proverbs 31:8 where Scripture instructs that we open our mouths for those who have no voice. Poor. Needy. Marginalized. Manipulated. Misled. That's what Paul did. He opened his mouth and opposed his colleague. We need more confrontation today, do we not? Many of our leaders sit in church on Sunday and are never confronted about the disparities that exist between their profession of piety and their promotion of policies that contradict the principles of God. They are not confronted when they profess to be pro-life but support policies that disrupt life, and that take lives. They profess to represent the masses but engage in actions that only benefit a few. There needs to be more confrontation, not violence but confrontation. But what was it about Peter's action or what inferences were made to antagonize Paul to such a degree that he uses such strong language. What caused him to rise up with such passion?

There are several implications of Peter's action that Paul assesses as contrary to Christ and condescending to the Gentile believers. Central to Paul's assessment and

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[36] P. J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of Paul to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 222.

argument is the language that he uses in 2:14, where he notes the departure in the behavior of Peter and other Jewish Christians, most notably Barnabas, from the "truth of the gospel." He uses the verb *orthopodeo* -to walk in line. In other words, he says that the thinking and the resulting behaviors that Peter and others displayed were not in accordance or in line with the gospel. I want that to rest on you. He says that Peter's unwillingness to fellowship, to be communion, or to be identified with the Gentiles was out of line with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were the opposite of the unity achieved by the gospel. Why? Because their actions inferred that unless the Gentiles acquiesced to circumcision, representative of the pattern of life consistent with the Law, then they were unclean, hence the need for the Jewish Christians to separate from them. Paula Fredricksen explains the implication for a non-Jew to be circumcised was to change gods, practices, and by extension, ethnicity because one's ties to his patriarchy would be altered.[37] In other words, they would need to become Jews, a proselyte, but a Jew. Paul the theological requirement for specific ethnicity was a non-negotiable non-essential aspect of the gospel for which he was prepared to fight, as demonstrated by his "opposition" to Peter. In Paul's mind, Peter, Barnabas, and those who joined them in their withdrawal may not have been guilty of heresy, but they were guilty of hypocrisy. Influenced by the pressures and protocols of their racial identity, they had violated their consciousness regarding the truth of the gospel. Friends this is a pattern of behaviors that we see all too prevalent in many churches today. Many white evangelical and scared negro preachers refuse to speak out against the injustices we observe in our society. Through their silence, they give their consent to the atrocities that continue to plague us.

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[37] Paula Fredrickson, "Why Should a Law-free Mission Mean a Law-free Apostle?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 3 (2018): 643.

This has nothing to do with the church they say. We are not responsible for those outside the realm of Christendom. Paul reminds us in Acts 17:26, that God, from one blood made every nation. Therefore, even though we may not be brothers as it pertains to Christianity, we are all connected regarding God's Creation.

But as it pertains to those of us who are Christians, Paul begins by asserting what Peter, the Jewish Christians and himself have in common, their fraternal relationship and their faith in the work of Jesus Christ. He notes their heritage in Galatians 2:15, citing that they were all "Jews by birth" and facetiously, "not Gentile 'sinners.'" He furthers by articulating their trust in the faith of Jesus in verse 16, "yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law."

As Hays argues, Paul contended that justification was a common doctrine in and conviction of the Jewish Christians and all parties in our pericope were in accord and in fact affirmed that believers were justified through the faith of Jesus Christ. What Paul was asserting was the divergence between Peter's beliefs and his behavior.[38] To behave in a way that denied what he believed was wrong. Again, he knew that Peter understood that justification, being placed in the right relationship with God, is accomplished through Jesus Christ, and in no way were the Gentiles inferior to the Jews in their relationship to God. This is why Paul contends that Peter stood, *kataginosko* - self-condemned (NRSV). In other words, he was convicted or better accused by his actions. Peter's actions suggested that it was the *works of the Law,* through which believers are justified. To

[38] R. B. Hays, "Justification" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2011), 1131.

reiterate, Peter's actions suggested that believers are made right with God through meritorious works commanded in the Torah. In other words, the suggestion was one's identification with Jewish customs or their Jewishness that would justify them. This was an abhorrent concept to Paul, considering the gospel. Similarly, some suggest their whiteness is what makes them justified in God's sight. To be sure, it is not an overt suggestion, but it is subtle. We see it in the whitewashing of Christianity through the purposeful silence of the contributions of those kissed by nature's Sun to the furtherance of the faith. Augustine, Cyprian, Tertullian, Asthanasius all were great contributors to theology, whose impact is undeniable, yet we hear very little about their contribution. Like, Peter whose action subtly diminished one set of people and lifted another was wrong then, it is wrong today, not just from a social perspective but a spiritual perspective, it is wrong. It in essence denies the grace of God. It suggests that something other than God's grace, through Jesus Christ, sustains our relationship with Him.

The doctrine of justification through the faith of Christ was, for Paul, the banner under which the Church existed as a new people, uniting Jews and Gentiles, demonstrated, at least in part, by their fellowship at the table.[39] He was so emphatic about this truth that he ends verse 15 stating, no one will be justified by the works of the Law.

Applications for the believer

So, what does this mean for the believer? How does this inform our practice and influence our engagement with others? I believe this pericope is highly impactful to our Christian practice, specifically the concept of fellowship and unity, particularly with

[39] Hays, *Justification.*

those of differing ethnicities and cultures. It is indisputable that, based on Scripture, at one time, the Jews occupied a privileged status as God's covenant people and Gentiles were considered strangers because they were alien to that covenant status.[40] However, through the faithfulness of Christ, particularly His salvific work, God had now judged that nationalist and ethnic distinctions were no longer factors of His covenant, but rather only those who exercise faith in Christ are justified and enjoy the privilege of covenant relationships with God.[41]

This concept is of particular importance in our current cultural context. We witness actions that acquiesce to the privilege of the majority culture of our country. We witness oppression being outright denied or silently affirmed, and the Church is not unaffected. Political posturing and loyalties to agendas that contradict the gospel are prevalent even within the Christian community. As Paul contends, the essence of our relationship and engagement with one another, specifically as Christians, must be based on what the gospel accomplishes, and the Holy Spirit facilitates - unity. Our fellowship does not deny but is beyond our nationalistic identity, race or ethnicity, subcultures, age, socio-economic status, educational achievements, and political affiliations. To prioritize one group over another is an act of heinous hypocrisy. These demographics and demarcates must not be allowed to fracture the community of Christ. When we as Christians separate ourselves from others, particularly other Christians, based on demographics, social demarcations, and the like, we inherently infer that Jesus' work is not enough for fellowship to remain extant within the body of Christ. When we fail to

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[40] Hansen, *Galatians.*

[41] Hansen, *Galatians.*

acknowledge the suffering, pain, and plight of the marginalized, because of their hue, we fail to adhere to the mandates of Christ. Such behavior is divisive to the body and dismissive of our Lord and reflects poorly on our conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It is therefore, incumbent upon every believer to examine themselves to determine if they are LIVING in the faith, 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Conclusion

The former is a question that we must all answer. Sadly, at that moment, the answer for Peter was no. He behaved hypocritically. But I believe that he learned from his experiences, and we can as well. When we ask ourselves, Am I LIVING in the faith? The answer should be, and prayerfully will be, met with the response of Paul's words in Galatians 2:20, "And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Prayerfully what comes from our lips will be seen in our lives - our words will be congruent with our ways and our deeds will match our declarations. Our hearts and our hands will be guided by God to the extent that what others will see is the rejection of hypocrisy and reflection of holiness through the undeniable presence of our Exemplar Jesus Christ in each of our lives and our commitment to be guided by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to embody the ethic of unity that God intends for His Church.

Let us Pray

Sermon Seven

A Demonstration in Discipleship

John 13:34-35 – "*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way. The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear, Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear; And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds, For to see good put in action is what everybody needs."*

These words are an excerpt from the poem entitled "Sermons We See" written by Edgar Guest who was known as the people's poet. But long before the people's poet conjured these words, in our text this morning we see them modeled by the people's Savior.

The scene is what many theologians and laypeople refer to as the Last Supper. This will be the last time of fellowship between Jesus and His disciples before His imminent state-sanctioned crucifixion by Rome in conspiracy with the Jewish religious aristocracy. It's just before the Passover, the time of celebration and worship when the Hebrew people reflect upon God's deliverance of them from Egyptian bondage and oppression. You remember, don't you, that God commanded each family to sacrifice a lamb – to take its blood and smear it on their doorpost as a sign of covenant and covering from the death angel who at God's command would claim the life of the firstborn of every household, not in covenant with God as indicated by the blood of the lamb. In just a few days, however, Jesus would show all the world that He is the true lamb of deliverance that provides salvation from sin and eternal death. But in preparation for His

departure, he spends some intimate moments with the twelve chosen men who have followed him in his earthly journey.

Before Jesus begins his Farewell Discourse, in which He will give final instructions and encouragement before His death, he provides a tangible treatise – in other words, a sermon they can see. If you have time, I invite you to look together with me at this text, so we too can see Jesus in this demonstration of discipleship.

Again, Jesus and his disciples are engaged in a moment of fellowship. Visualize them reclined around the table. See them in company with one another as they partake of the food that has been prepared. Smell the aroma of the sumptuous fare: perhaps a roast lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread and fragrant wine. Hear the conversations. Imagine the disciples' wonderings, their unvoiced questions and concerns, and perchance their premature conclusions. Amid the supper, without prior explanation, Jesus, the text says, rises up from the table, lays aside his outer garment, ties a towel around his waist, grabs a basin, and begins to wash the disciples' feet.

Family, I want you to see, first, that Jesus provides the disciples with an **Example of Service.** Take careful notice of Jesus' actions. He leaves his place of comfort, pulls off the garment of a host, replaces it with the tool of a servant, and performs the duties of a slave. But this isn't the first time we've seen this kind of behavior from Jesus, is it? Remember a little over 33 years before this episode, Jesus left the glory of heaven, wrapped himself in the limitations of humanity, and came through forty-two generations, purposed to serve and to save. Isn't that right? So, we see that intent again now, and one more time later as John intends an allusion to Jesus' imminent laying down of life.[42] For

[42] Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, vol. 4, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 328.

now though, our Lord and Savior humbles himself and picks up a towel, to wash his disciples' feet.

It is an ironic task to be performed by the Creator, God in the Flesh and Savior of the world. Foot washing was a gesture of hospitality towards guests in the home, but usually a task assigned to a Gentile slave.[43] We can understand then how this act of servitude offends some of the disciples. We see this in Peter as he verbally expresses his reluctance. YOU will never wash MY feet, Peter exclaims. But the Lord is emphatic as well. He makes it clear that a refusal to allow Him to serve them in this way is a rejection of fellowship with Him altogether. No wonder Peter says wash all of me. but Jesus clarifies his actions,

Listen, what Jesus intended for his followers then and now to grasp is important. We must understand when you are a disciple of Christ, positional status is no exemption from rendering personal service. A call from Christ is a call to salvation, which is also a call to serve. We're saved to serve. Lest we be curt and insincere, this is not a license to negate rendering honor to whom honor is due, which is not about judging someone else. Rather, it's a mandate for our self-examination. It serves notice that whenever we are in positions of leadership or have been entrusted with some modicum of authority, to never allow the pride of our position to contaminate the purity of God's purpose for our life. Jesus says in John 13:13-15, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." Jesus implies there's nothing wrong with a title and nothing wrong with

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[43] Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Second edition., vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2017), 326.

giving honor. However, it's problematic when we are eager to reap the benefits of a title but try to evade the responsibility of bearing the towel.

In his book *Who Switched the Price Tags?* the author tells of an African American pastor who was preaching to some students who were about to graduate. The pastor said, "Children, you are all going to die! One of these days the hearse is going to take you to the cemetery, drop you in a hole and everyone's going back to the church to eat potato salad. When you were born, you were crying and everyone else was happy. Here is the question, "˜When you die, will you be the only happy one with everyone else crying?" The answer depends upon whether you lived to get titles or to serve and facilitate testimonies." [44]

Listen, friends, Jesus is King of kings, Lord of lords, Great High Priest, Master Teacher, He has no shortage of titles. But in spite of all His titles, Jesus' life was characterized by his willingness to take the towel of servitude and leave his disciples an example of service. But, in addition to being an example of service, this display of Jesus is also an expression of love. John 13:1, "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Realizing his hour is now imminent, Jesus still acts in love just as he has throughout his life. Can I ask you a question? When you look at life's dashboard, and the indicator light of suffering is flashing, who are you thinking about? When you're going through it, are you still concerned about how others are making it, or are you only consumed by your situation? It would have been easy to focus on himself in these final

[44] Tony Campolo, *Who Switched the Price Tags?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2008).

moments, wouldn't it? Certainly, we could understand if Jesus didn't feel like talking; if he had said I'll just take my plate with me, we would feel where Jesus was coming from.

The text says, however, that Jesus loved his own "to the end." The phrase "to the end" can also be translated as "fully" or "to the utmost." It may be that both meanings are heard in concert because in loving his own "to the end" Jesus demonstrates that he loves them "to the utmost."[45] Jesus loves as much as it is possible to love. This love is displayed in all that follows in chapters 13-17, beginning with the foot washing.[46]

In the coming days Peter would deny him, but Jesus still washed his feet. Thomas would doubt him, but still, Jesus washed his feet. Nine others would desert him, yet Jesus washed their feet. Why? Because Jesus loved them. Maybe this is one of the experiences that the Holy Spirit brings to Peter's memory when He inspires the apostle to write in 1 Peter 4:8, "Love covers a multitude of sins." Jesus' display, his demonstration of discipleship, sets for us an example of service. It models an expression of love, but I believe one of the greatest perspectives from which we can perceive this great love that Jesus expresses and models for us is in His willingness to endure betrayal.

Endurance of Betrayal

Sometimes, God may reveal a person's heart to you in a way that discloses their true intention. It may be true that they mean you no good. But our response, according to Jesus' example, is to endure the betrayal and still wash their feet. Even though you may discern their ill will, others may naively positively misinterpret their action. Still, keep

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[45] Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 749.

[46] Whitacre, *John*, 327.

loving and washing their feet. Think about it. Other than Jesus, perhaps only John knew Judas was the one who would betray the Lord. Even after Satan entered Judas' heart, verse 28 informs us that none of the other disciples knew why Jesus told Judas to act quickly. John 13:28-29 "Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor." Listen, Jesus shows us, Family, it's not our responsibility to get revenge or to recruit others to our cause by broadcasting a person's lack of character or potential betrayal. Though he did say he would experience this painful dilemma, what he did not do was indict Judas specifically or share his evil intent with the other disciples. Rather, he told Judas to do whatever it is you're going to do. I've asked myself why. Maybe it's because Jesus knew the others would try to stop Judas. But Jesus understood Judas was necessary. It was necessary to endure the pain of betrayal to experience the fulfillment of his purpose.

God said He'd make your enemies your footstool, which means when you're frowned upon for obedience to God; when you're suffering for righteousness, enemies are often the building blocks to your spiritual development and elevation in God's purpose. Come here, Joseph. Somebody remembers Joseph from Sunday School… He was a dreamer; the presence of God characterized his life. Joseph will tell you that when those who are closest to you betray you, God can take what they mean for evil and use it for your good! So maybe instead of complaining you should thank God for your enemies. (Enemies of your righteousness; not your wickedness) But before we get too happy and with contempt, give Judas the side eye, we need to remember, at times we too betray Christ. Like Peter, there have been times we've denied Christ, perhaps not with our

communication but with our conduct. Like Thomas, we've doubted the Lord, and like the others, some of us have deserted God. I hear you saying yes preacher I'm guilty, but I never betrayed the Lord like Judas. I never sold Jesus out for a little silver like Judas. But family I beg to differ. You, me, and everyone else have betrayed the Lord. Every time we sin and choose our desires above the directives of God, we betray Jesus. When we place our pleasure above God's principles, we betray Jesus and still we petition the Lord to have regard for us; to grant us to sit at his table, to afford us the privilege of his blessing, and to grant us the blessed opportunity to have the stench, and dirt and debris that we have accumulated along our path to be washed from our feet by the water of his word and the towel of his sacrifice. And all I'm saying family if we're going to be disciples of Christ, the same way he forgives us and refuses to withhold his love and blesses us, we must also be willing to love and forgive and continue to serve one another. Finally, that's what Jesus desires. Love is the example He set. Love is the action he expressed. Love is the reason he endured. And love is the expectation he has for his disciples.

Expectations of His Disciples

After Judas is dismissed to go and conspire with those who also oppose Christ, Jesus again reminds His disciples of his imminent departure. But in verses 31-32, Jesus emphasizes that this is for the Father's glory and, by implication, the Son's vindication. The cross, the resurrection, Jesus' ascension back to Heaven, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will all, in concert, demonstrate the Lord's obedience is being honored and just as He said, He, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are one. But there is something imperative for his disciples to understand and practice - they must love one another. John

13:34-35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Jesus says this is a new command. What makes it new though? Remember all of Jesus' disciples – particularly the Twelve, are of Jewish heritage. Their love was initially based on their ethnicity – the fact they were all the same nationality. But Jesus reorients the basis of their love. Now, he says their love is not based on their country but rather on Christ himself. Parenthetically, this is why I sometimes have an issue with some evangelicals’ expression of Christianity, because they say God bless America and, by implication, nobody else. But Jesus makes it clear if you’re his disciple, anyone else who is his disciple must also be the object of your love and affection irrespective of their background.

He says to love them like I have loved you. How have you loved me, Jesus? I have loved you to the utmost. I loved you enough to choose you despite your flaws, forgive you, irrespective of your sins, sacrifice for you even when you were ungrateful, serve you when you failed to serve me, and lift you from depravity to discipleship. I agree with the songwriter when he says love lifted me.

While we can’t save one another, we can in love serve one another. I can love you, and you can love me even when it’s not easy because Jesus has shown us how and because he expects it. Family, it’s this kind of love that demonstrates we are truly disciples of Jesus. It’s this kind of love that provides the testimony that we belong to him. It’s this kind of love that reflects the unity that is characteristic of the Godhead and facilitated by the Holy Spirit. It is this kind of love that compels God’s desire that we be

united with Him and one another. So family, as we bring this series to a close, let's be mindful to strive to meet the Lord's expectations, to be submissive to His Spirit and endeavor to be unified in the bond of love because as His disciples we truly are better together. Worship. Work. Sing. Sit. Stand. Serve. Pray. Grow. Glorify God.

APPENDIX B

BIBLE STUDY

Bible Study

Devotion

Reading of the text

Reflections on Sunday's Sermon

Guiding Questions for Discovery and Dialogue

1. Discuss how the persons in the text or audience of text are builders or barriers of unity.
2. What are the specific attitudes or actions of these persons that reveal their contribution or detraction from unity?
3. Discuss how these attitudes or actions align or conflict with the Holy Spirit's expectations of believers to facilitate the maintenance of unity.
4. Based on this text and the previous points of discussion, what attitudes or actions are believers being commanded/encouraged to desist, develop or continue?
5. How do these principles specifically apply to our community of faith? How can we incorporate them into our individual/collective practices?

Lingering Questions

Journal

Doxology

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